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**SIMPLE
MINDS**
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THRASHING DOVES
GREIL MARCUS ON ELVIS
DISCO: WHAT IT WAS
FUZZBOX
LITTLE STEVEN
MARIANNE FAITHFULL
ON THE SET WITH
ALEX COX,
JOE STRUMMER





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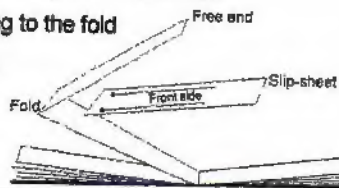
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Volume Three Number Five

August 1987

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TOP SPIN

Before we read, we see: Paul Simon, in a black sportcoat and white T-shirt, smiling broadly into the camera. Surrounding him, smiling just as broadly, are ten black men in dashikis.

How reliable is the information presented in this picture? What historical circumstances does it ignore, and which does it assume are natural? Does this image, which exists against a background of apartheid, really bite the master or just deny his villainy? If it attacks, does it invisibly—that is, ideologically—reduce apartheid to a cultural killjoy, and the benefits to be reaped from its fall to the pleasures of a Paul Simon concert? And, most importantly, what interest does the source of the image—a major American magazine—have in presenting this particular information?

In 1987, the so-called information revolution means an increase not just in the data available to us, but also in the forces influencing our interpretation of that data: the intermediary forces which make a photo of Paul Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo more than just a photo of Paul Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Some are obvious; a pic of Donna Rice in a bikini on the cover of *People* practically screams them out. Others are insidious. Others are as much fun as the signal itself; if unreliability didn't have its own appeal, we wouldn't read the *Enquirer*, even on the sly.

By no design of the SPIN editors, several stories in this issue rub noses with this notion of information that gets lost or twisted on its way home.

August 16 marks the tenth anniversary of the death of Elvis Presley. As Graceland gears up for what promises to be the biggest Elvis International Tribute Week ever, connoisseurs of myth and misinformation can only wish the King's trustees had managed to complete the hotel with the guitar-shaped swimming pool in time for the festivities. It's a replica of a pool in Nashville that had no connection to Presley, but benighted pilgrims to Memphis regularly ask about it. So now they're going to get it. At Graceland, they believe in giving you the complete myth.

In this month's Antihero column, Greil Marcus takes aim at the meaning

of Elvis and finds a fragmented mirror in which various pop thinkers see themselves but miss the image's discontinuity. In the dark, we may know each other by our respective ideas on the Elvis question.

More stuff: In the Soviet Union, under the new permissiveness that Premier Gorbachev calls *glasnost*, a new youth culture is emerging. This interests us. For the first time, we know something of our Russian peers.

Dang if it doesn't look just like a reflection of our own countercultures—as though Russians, if left to their own devices, want to recapitulate American trends. In "The Politics of Dancing," Mickey Remann questions *glasnost* and our perception of it. Are these punks, etc., really the bearers of cultural revolution or just a smokescreen sent up to keep the West happy? We originally planned to call this story "Ivan Gets a Camaro," but thought better of it.

More funky stuff: In "Hot Stuff," Bart Bull and I (but mostly Bart) reappraise disco, the only music ever burned between games of a White Sox doubleheader. Listening to those old Barry White or Andrea True Connection sides now, stripped of their cultural underpinnings, it's hard to believe that all that fuss was really about the music: that thousands of cultural critics committed mass symbolic arson over a supple wacka-wacka wah-wah rhythm riff and a little Latin percussion. As the authors ran back and forth between offices, tearing each other away from "Kung Fu Fighting" to hear "Get Down Tonight," it was remarkable to see how many SPIN staffers, some of whom probably yelled "disco sucks" at least once in their lives, got off on the music, and promised to love one another just a little more, baby. We were transformed, and it wasn't a pretty sight. Which just goes to show that, as a mediating force, nostalgia can sometimes overshadow racism and homophobia and even puritanism.

And that the big problem with peeling away ideological biases is that the process disguises your own. So you can trust us, but maybe you want to cut the cards.

—John Leland



Eber Roberts

Left: The King, crowned with flowers. Below: The art of Glasnost. Bottom left: Steamy sin-sation magazines of the '50s. Bottom right: Little Steven, little.



Sergei Borisov



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POINT BLANK



Jeff Katz

Letters

Edited by Karen Dolan

Seeing Red

Regarding the feature on Simply Red [March] and the responding letter from S.E. Wilson, I'd like to clear a few things up. The quote attributed to me, with regard to the subject of condoms, was taken completely out of context. We were in fact discussing the dilemmas of birth control; not only condoms, but also the far from certain consequences of long- and short-term use of the "pill." The question of AIDS did not even enter the discussion. I'm angry and dismayed at this dangerous misrepresentation. Your English correspondent was most thoughtless in not making this radical distinction clear. I would never be so irresponsible as to encourage people not to take precautions against this most serious of diseases. Everyone should be careful and caring about sexuality and AIDS and perhaps, in your case, responsible journalism.

Mick Hucknall
Simply Red

Throwin' down the gauntlet

I was disgusted, shocked, and infuriated when I read the article stating that Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis are better than Prince [May]! What the heck is this Fernandez guy trying to prove? Jimmy and Terry have not even come close to creating the highs that Prince has on any of his nine albums. They are just really good at hitting the start button on a drum machine. An album does not have to be commercial to be good, or good to be commercial. Samantha Fox going Top 10 proves that

Aneese Bhatia
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

No mere bimbo

Did it ever occur to Julie Burchill that the reason Warren Beatty [June] finds it necessary to remind people of his intelligence is because so-called

Overruling Prince

"journalists" like her and Rex Reed find it necessary to ignore that very fact? No mere "bimbo" would have had the creative genius to make a film like *Reds*. Perhaps Ms. Burchill should stop concentrating on the man's libido and give him some credit for his contributions to the film industry.

L. Kennedy
Skaneateles, NY

About Julie Burchill's article on Warren Beatty: I could smell the venom! Made me suspicious as to when Beatty must have rejected Ms. Burchill

Joseph Weger
Dallas, TX

A Rolling Shaf gathers no moss

I've never heard of this Paul Shaffer guy before that ridiculous commercial where he misrepresents *Rolling Stone* as a hip *Newsweek* (an oxymoron in itself). Like Prince Charles, I have better things to do at 12:30 than watch TV (even if it is sleeping). And why is he preoccupied with being hip? Doesn't he know that it's hip to be square?

Kent Westmoreland
New Orleans, LA

I knew the groom when . . .

Wait a minute. You mean to tell me that Paul Westerberg ("Replacements," June) is engaged?! Are we talking about the same guy? The Paul Westerberg I know and love was last seen singing "Gary's Got a Boner" while fans threw beer cans at him. He's getting married?! That's just so trendy. These are terrible times we live in

F. Decker
Brooklyn, NY

Bowie

Your article depicting Bowie as a "pantomime cat" and "not sure of which way to go" was insightful, refreshingly irreverent, and frank [March]. I admire the attempt to demystify and put a finger on this man and his soul. One problem . . . you were dead wrong.

Irene Hara
Baltimore, MD

Believe it or not

After reading your article about the True Believers [May], I lost a considerable amount of respect for the band. Nevertheless, I was able to see them on May 10 and managed to

work up enough courage to tell them how much I enjoyed the show. Because of your article, I was sure they would be arrogant, overdressed jerks, but was quite surprised. They were extremely friendly and polite. I think SPIN, particularly Pat Blashill, owes the True Believers an apology

Jen Hardt
Omaha, NE

Cut the crap

Before I read your Hank Jr./Springsteen review I'd planned to remain a cynic [May]. I stand reformed. You believe in nothing if you so easily renounce Springsteen when he has proven his integrity so many times. Show a little faith. As for myself, I believe in coyotes, wonder if Simon F. believes in God, and am heading to Paris to find Morrison and prove you wrong.

Chris LaVigne
Muncie, IN

A live disappointment

Like you, I was severely disappointed with Bruce's live album [Hank Williams, Jr. review, May]. A new Bruce album had always meant progress, but that album just ran in place. It was just good, and we demand greatness, every time. But what's all this shit about cutting down rednecks and Bruce's audience perception? I never realized rock credibility was based on fucking a screaming, teenage fan. How profound

Bill Repsher
Fountain Springs, PA

Cartoon cowboy

The only possible reason for listening to a Dwight Yoakam [June] record is the guitar solos. Much like suffering through a Ricky Nelson record to hear James Burton, 'Lil Yoakam has no voice, only a croak. He's a caricature of a Saturday morning cartoon cowboy/singer. He hides behind the low-slung hat, the James Dean hunch/pout, the obligatory guitar/penis appendage and Cuban-heeled rubber leg. I'd like to see him come out without all that and stand there and sing a song he wrote that means something to him. I'd bet my MTV Rocksinger Image Manual that ain't gonna happen.

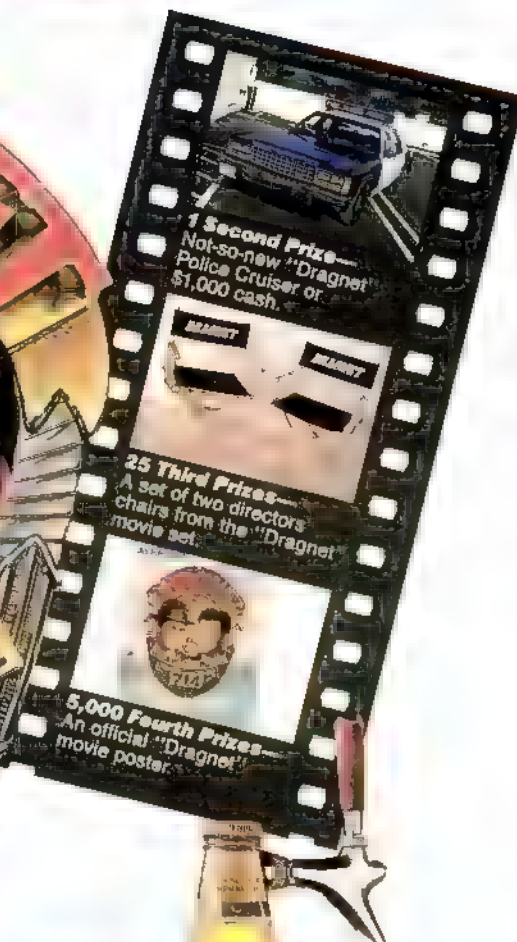
Scott Weatherspoon
Mishawaka, IN

Correction

The four Anthrax photos on page 52 [July] should have been credited to Harvey Wang

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As Real As It Gets





FLASH

Summer Listening Guide, Hugo Largo, Boogie Down Productions, Ned Sublette, Green, Raging Slab, Lady Elvis, Missed Information

Edited by John Leland

SUMMER LISTENING GUIDE

How to distinguish one AOR dinosaur from the next

BRYAN ADAMS *Into the Fire*

Killer performance at Amnesty; told off Virgin Records president Richard Branson on TV

Duets with Tina Turner: mawkish streak looks like a 12 year old

The next Bruce Springsteen

Had a job, it felt through; Land ord says the rent is due."

Growing up is hard to do

Moody, romantic loner

Two

High: well-intentioned wimp

None

"Your first breath is taken and into the world you are cast/You long for tomorrow while living each day as your last."

Songs: "Into the Fire," "Heat of the Night," "Hearts of Fire"

None

"What you get ain't always what you need"

TOM PETTY *Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)*

Did a Roger McGuinn song better than McGuinn, refused to change lyrics to "Listen to Her Heart" to get on radio fought record list-price increases

Duets with Stevie Nicks: redneck streak, double-neck guitar

The next Bob Dylan

"I guess it's one of those things You can never explain/Like when an angel cries. Like runaway trains."

Leave me alone, I'm cranky

Pseudo-New Wave widman

One

High: smug, self-righteous cretin

"He's a self-made man He knows how to lose."

"Take back Vanessa Redgrave. Take back Joe Piscopo. Take back Eddie Murphy. Give 'em a place to go."

On May 17, an arsonist set fire to Petty's home in Encino, CA

"I'm not looking for sympathy. I'm just frightened by this apathy

"You can walk away but it's not over"

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THE ALBUM REVIEWS ITSELF



Hugo Largo (l. R., Mimi Goese, Hahn Rowe, Adam Peacock, Tim Sommer)

EGO LARGO

You know how it is when you wake up and for a few seconds everything in the room bleeds into your dream? Or how a dramatic shift in the elements, say snow or heavy rain, throws you into a trance? The four members of Hugo Largo know that, too. Their songs are impressionistic landscapes that you either love or hate. Singer Mimi Goese's swooping vocals wind up and around the lyrics, dual basses of Adam Peacock and Tim Sommer, while Hahn Rowe's restrained violin darts in and out. One snide friend described their sound as "Judy Collins on Quaaludes."

but the big thing about Hugo Largo is that they use no percussion: hence, the tongue-in-cheek title of their debut EP "Drum."

He always wanted to base a band around the idea of what two basses interplaying could do," explains Sommer. Tired of his hardcore group, Even Worse, and coming off a tour with Glenn Branca, Sommer first put his concept to work in early 1984 with bassist Greg Lelton. He invited Goese, a dancer, to do vocals. "I'd never spoken into a mike before the first show, let alone sung," she confesses. "I was too scared to really sing so I just did these sort of melodic lines."

Those first Hugo Largo gigs were, well, saw them then," laughs Rowe, an engineer and, along with Peacock and Sommer, a Branca veteran. Ninety percent of their songs were in the same key and tempo. I thought that was really minimalist and radical." Little did he know it wasn't intentional. Even when Peacock, a photographer and frustrated bassist, first replaced Lelton, the

sound was, he says, "these two plinky basses, like metronomes. There was no resonance."

Hugo Largo's sound has gotten denser in the year and a half since Rowe added his violin. They've also gained Michael Sipe as a devotee. Sommer, a friend of Sipe's, passed him a demo at an R.E.M. show in the fall of '85 and a few months later received an "if there's anything I can do," ca. Sipe eventually coproduced three "Drum" tracks and sang back up. "Michael has been infinitely patient and supportive," Sommer notes. Adds Goese, whose abstract lyrics share obvious affinities with Sipe's, "He's religious about us—more religious than we are." But Hugo Largo is not entirely without a reflexive sense of the religious. When Goese prods Sommer to learn to hold his pick correctly, and suggests practicing in front of the mirror, he shoots back, "I do," but I just look at my hair."

Katherine Dieckmann

RAP ATTACK

On record, M.C. Shan is the mortal enemy of Boogie Down Productions' Scott LaRock and KRS One. They've been trading insults and waging a dis fest the likes of which are usually reserved for Yankee/Red Sox games. At stake in this 12-inch war is which borough of New York City rules rap. And like any street battle, it's been lowdown and nasty all the way.

Shan started it with "The Bridge," a rap celebrating the Queensbridge housing project where he, producer Marley Marl, and Roxanne Shanté lived. These claims of local supremacy begat Boogie Down's "South Bronx," in which KRS One traced the beat back to his home neighborhood in the mid '70s and advised Shan to get his "homeboys off crack."

Shan and Marley Marl counterpunched with "Kill That Noise," which intercut the sampled chorus of "South Bronx" with a description of Shan's gun and the threat, "Those who try to make fame on my name die." Boogie Down answered with "The Bridge Is Over," which questioned Shan's manhood more than his sense of history and told the Juice Crew (the umbrella outfit that includes Shan, Marley, Shanté, Biz Markie, T.J. Swan, and disk jockey Mr. Magic) what to suck.

Though neither side will stick to one version of the facts, both Shan and Boogie Down claim that the feud is confined to vinyl. They even claim to like each other... sort of. So what gives? Is all the fuss just a publicity gimmick?

"Shan's the voice of the Juice Crew," says Scott LaRock, "so he bought the bullet. But our beef ain't with Shan, it's with Mr. Magic." LaRock says the group first met Mr. Magic, a WBLS DJ who airs two of New York's four weekly rap shows, at Power Play studios. They were newcomers, and Magic asked, "who are y'all niggers?" Since then, things just haven't been right. Magic scoffs at the notion of a hip hop feud, but adds that he's under "advisement" from WBLS's lawyers not to discuss any details of it. "I can't play a record where someone's talkin' 'bout me," he says by way of explaining his noninvolvement in this nonfeud; "that doesn't make any sense."

One fact that all the parties involved will agree on is that the war is fueling record sales. Both Shan and Boogie Down claim the other's dissing has done wonders for their respective careers. "People want to hear this stuff, they expect it—it's show biz," remarks Shan.

The two are willing to perform together, if the price is right. "Face it, in hip hop, two crews battle each other," waxes KRS One philosophically. "One thing is certain. You get battles, new artists, radical records—and new stuff from Def Jam."

Amy Elizabeth Linden



KRS One and Scott LaRock



Photo: Curt

DOWNTOWN SUBLETTE

Ned Sublette can't believe his ears. The waitress in the Nashville steak house has just informed him that, no, there isn't no honest-to-Hank milk for his coffee—only the goop in the little plastic package labeled "nondairy coffee lightener." He shakes his head sadly and tries drinking the stuff black. No good. So he tries ordering a beer, only to discover that there isn't no locally brewed beer in Music City. He shrugs in grim defeat. Welcome to America, boy.

Sublette—a lanky, 35-year-old southerner who's stationed himself in the Big Apple for most of the last 10 years—has his own ideas of good things American. Like big black cowboy hats, salsa and hip hop music, AM radio, John Cage, and Lefty Frizzell. He laments the passing of the "spirit of the maverick" from American culture, and the idiosyncratic songs that delineate his modern honky-tonk persona are his modest effort at restoring that lost essence to so-called "country" music. Says Ned, "I'm a nice guy, but Wonder Bread makes me mad."

Traditionally, mavericks of any kind are almost *never* welcome in Nashville. And though big Ned's come here to perform the humbling ritual of "showcasing" that all artists in search of recording contracts are put through, he looks like anything but a guy with his hat in his hand. At his show at the Exit Inn he swings his six-piece band into the set with "Roughneck," a country-rap hybrid that evokes Merle Haggard jamming with Run-DMC.

Compromise is similarly scarce from the rest of the show: a couple of potential bar-room jukebox favorites interwoven with ditties like "Cattle Mutilation" (a rock'n

tale of extraterrestrial carnivores) and "Disappear Into the Cracklin' Sound" (a western-swing praise-song to amplitude modulation). All this is neatly encored for the cheering crowd with the notorious

"Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly (fond of each other)." Ned keeps his newest and most challenging material under wraps. "Salvation, Kansas" is a novel-in-song about a farm family's disintegration as it teeters on the edge of bankruptcy. Pop starts drinking and fooling around with a floozy while Junior takes up with a burned-out vet, who introduces the boy to acid and the right-wing Christian militia run by the Reverend Radio. Mom confronts Dad about his responsibility for the family's collapse and pushes him to reach for his shotgun. Out front, several cars of state troopers roll up. Junior, thinking they've come for him, opens fire, bringing Dad to the door with his weapon still in his hands. The ensuing body count varies with each performance (Ned himself isn't sure how it ends), but it wraps up with the rousing "I Like the Feel of a Gun in My Hand."

One has to wonder, Is this guy too smart for his own good? In defense of his eclecticism, Ned offers, "All good western dance bands, whether it's Bob Wills or the Chicano bands I used to go see in Albuquerque, mix it up from song to song. Like, first they'll play a two-step, then a cumbia, then a polka, then some disco."

Which is to say, the secret of a vital culture lies in its lust to mongrelize, to draw input from outside the immediate gene pool. Somehow, I don't think Nashville is privy to this inside info. That's their, and ultimately *our*, loss.

—Lou Stathis

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SIMPLY GREEN



Green (L-R) Jeff Lescher, Ken Kurson, Rich Chilton

My philosophy for signing up for classes was to take the ones that had the shortest lines," says clean-cut Loyola University political-philosophy grad Jeff Lescher. The singer/songwriter/strummer is spokesman for Green, a suburban Chicago foursome that plays the most thoughtful and infectious white bread, pure-pop music to slide down the rock 'n' roll pipeline in eons. But no matter what his course-selection methods, Lescher did learn some things that he's since put into practice. Like, when the rest of Green quit on him, he kept the Green moniker (rather than switching to, say, "the Jeff Lescher Band") because a group name "perpetuates the myth that man can live in harmony."

Such half-baked axioms can sound like ostentatious folderol, but Lescher's music is anything but. Recorded on a \$6000 shoestring budget provided by a New Jersey architect who, Lescher says, "heard our [1984 7-inch] EP and asked, 'Why aren't those guys at the top of the pops?'" Green's eponymous debut album (available from 709 S. Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60304) is about as close to the spirit, sound and sh-t-worthy sonic standards of 60s AM radio as you can get in 1987 without turning camp. Green's hook-laden power pop draws heavily on Beatles VI, early Kinks, Motown, and rockabilly, but also nods to the Raspberries, Cheap Trick, glitter, and hardcore. Live, the group covers Eddie Cochran, the Yardbirds, Led Zeppelin, and Big Bill Broonzy by way of Derek and

the Dominos. The sandpaper-throated Lescher writes words about wanting a hit record and having crushes on girls, and he doesn't set out to be clever, but he comes out that way anyway.

One of the youngest (he's 26) of a seven-kid, upper-middle-class Catholic family, Lescher was literally raised on radio—"This Diamond Ring" by Gary Lewis and the Playboys was like my favorite song when I was five years old," he remembers. "Painfully shy" and "pretty angry inside" by his own description, he started composing songs and playing guitar in his mid-teens.

"I'm not as good a guitarist as Jimmy Page," he admits, "but I can write a song in about 20 minutes that I think is worth keeping." He's got 300 bittersweet serenades in his notebooks so far. Probably doesn't hurt that the one-time Life Scout has been courting the same woman for seven years—she inspires lines like, "If you're worried about money/I'll rob a bank or two for you," lines that he claims make people come up to him on the streets of Chicago and tell him, "My girlfriend would just love me to do a song like that about her." Lescher, who had to double-check his Sunday Mass plans before we scheduled our interview, figures false modesty about his considerable talents just a n't worth it. As he puts it, "I know I'm here on a mission from God."

—Chuck Eddy

RAGING SLAB



(L-R) Alec Morton, Tiny Steinman, Jag Slab, Tim Finetrock

WANTS A PLACE IN THE MALL OF FAME

Raging Slab is arguably the hippest metal-referent band in all of Manhattan, and among the reettest drinking buds you'll find anywhere in these United States. "We're not a drinking band per se, like the Repacements," explains lead singer/guitarist Jag (né Greg) Slab (né something Polish and unpronounceable). "But we do drink—probably more beer per capita than all of Husker Du put together."

The core of the group—Slab, slide guitarist Tiny Steinman, and skinsman Tim Finetrock—came of age in the suburbs of Los Angeles and Pittsburgh, where they were steeped in shopping mall culture. Jag hung out in suburban Pittsburgh's Monroeville Mall. That's where *Dawn Of The Dead* was shot, he points out with great pride.

"When Tiny and I met two and a half years ago, we decided to make a band that leaned more on our own roots than someone else's fake roots. I didn't grow up listening to James Brown." Jag pauses to relieve himself in a lightless, brick-walled bathroom. He returns and continues, "What we hope to do is mutate 70s mall-rock into something that's palatable to us now. It's not pure riffrock. It's filtered through our experiences playing in punk groups."

This Slab felta previously fronted a southern-based art-funk ensemble called R.E.M.—but not the R.E.M. "It was confusing trying to get booked out of our hometown. There was a lot of overlap because they're from Georgia and we were from the Virginia-Maryland area. Finally I walked up to their bass player downstairs at the

930 Club in Washington, D.C., and made a deal that whoever got a record out first got the name. They pretty much went 'bing-bang' and put out a single. Their manager used to show up in town with Love Tractor and say, 'The thing's in the can. Better change that name! The strong arm of Athens!'

Eventually, Jaggy grew "thoroughly disgusted" with that unit, moved to NYC, began hanging out with Tiny, and—after they attended a Girlschool concert together, he taught her to play slide guitar using a bottleneck cut from a jug of Night Train. After starting out as a Gun Club-ish affair, Raging Slab shuffled its lineup and made its vinyl debut with the feisty revisionist-metalurgy of *Feel Too Much*, "on a compilation called *The Bands That Ate New York*." The band's first LP is called *Assmaster*, which comes complete with a full-color gatefold sleeve and 16-page comic book. "It's a phony" concept album," Jags enthuses, pulling at his Gregg Allman-style beardlet and stache. "The songs were written prior to any conceptualization, but then we went and wrote the story for the comic book around them." Put together with the aid of Pat Redding, the creator of Marvel Comics' *The Nam*, the *Assmaster* book follows the improbable misadventures of a bug-eyed Big Daddy Roth kind of figure who winds up wrecking everything he touches.

"All drawn from personal experience," Slab assures me.

—Howard Wuelfing, Jr.

THE LADY ELVIS

"People tell me they can actually feel the presence of Elvis comin' out of me."

When Janice Kucera was a teenager in Exeter, Nebraska, her high school drama teacher cast her as an intergalactic female Elvis on a planet ruled by women. After this experience, Janice K, like so many whose lives have been touched by the King, was never the same.

"I never wanted to date Elvis," she says. "I wanted to be him."

From that day on, she gradually began to become her idol. She performed at a teen talent show wearing a gold vest and her hair slicked back with Brylcreem and had the emcee introduce her as Elvis Presley. In 1967, intrigued with Elvis's "majestic aura," she set out for Memphis to meet him.

And meet him she did. Through the president of Elvis's Memphis fan club, she got invited to one of Presley's exclusive all-night private parties at the old Memphian Theater, where the King showed Vincent Price oldies to friends. And on that night, by her own testimony, Janice K became one of Elvis's groupies.

Life accelerated. Janice took her act to Las

Vegas, to the lounges at the Mint and the Sahara, where people were "stunned and in awe" of her re-creation of Elvis's majestic aura. She landed a part in the film *Ratterty and the Gold Dust Twins* in 1974.

Happiness was upon her, but heartache lay in waiting. On August 16, 1977, Janice was working in the billing department of a Hollywood movie-camera rental shop when she received a long-distance phone call from a reporter with the Omaha *World-Herald*. He wanted her reaction to the news of Elvis's death.

"I hadn't heard the news before he telephoned," she remembers. "It was like the whole inside of me had just died at that moment. I thought, 'I've got to pick up my guitar or I'll never sing again.' I was afraid that because Elvis died, my voice would die." Janice returned home to Nebraska and promptly suffered a nervous breakdown.

She recovered and returned to work. And by December 17, 1983, she was in sufficiently fine physical and mental health to recognize the



David T. Benitz

hand of the miraculous. "I'd just been on the phone with Elvis's Uncle Vester and I was sitting at the kitchen table while Mama was cooking supper, and I noticed that there was a man looking in the south kitchen window—and it was *Elvis's image*! It was his forehead, cheekbones, and nose on the window screen. The next day I went outside and all the limbs on the evergreen tree behind the window were scorched and singed."

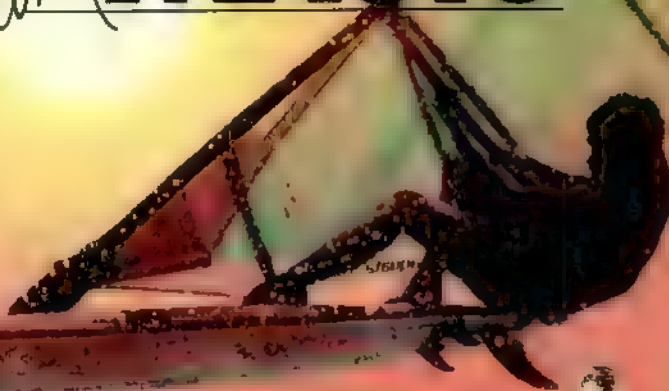
She says the image stayed on the window screen for four years, then faded and eventually vanished. She tried to photograph it, but when she had the pictures developed, Elvis's visage was nowhere to be seen.

These days, Janice continues to perform as the Lady Elvis, an earthly vessel with spiritual cause. She plans to make a video this year and has already put out an EP called "Janice K and the Phantom Band." She's now looking for a new band that can rock like her contemporary favorites, Loverboy and Wendy D. Williams. But through it all, she never loses sight of her true inspiration. "I wanna carry Elvis's image into the future and give back to the people what I saw in his live performances," she muses.

"I want to have people feel what I felt the first time I saw Elvis."

—Scott Harrah

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INFORMATION

MISSED

Teen role model **Michael Jackson** has offered the London Hospital Medical College **\$500,000** and no royalty points for the remains of John Merrick, the **Elephant Man**. According to Jackson's manager, the **squat** Frank Dileo, Jackson "cares about and is **concerned**



Chapel action press

with the Elephant Man as a **dedicated** and **devoted** collector of art and antiques " Dileo added that Jackson "hopes to add them to his collection of rare and unusual memorabilia at his California compound " A hospital spokesperson told reporters that "the skeleton has **never** been for sale." ▲ **Beastie-ality**: Beastie brat Adam Horowitz, the King Ad-Rock, was **arrested** in his London hotel room after a Beastie crowd of 3,000 showed its devotion and intelligence by **hurling bottles** throughout the Liverpool Theatre the previous night. Horowitz was released on \$16,000 bail, but Member of Parliament/Funkadelic Harry Greenway called for **banning the Boys** from Britain because "they leave a **trail of mayhem** in their wake." ▲ **Tammy and Jim**, part one. from Tammy's book, I Gotta Be Me, now a **collector's item**: "Jim's nerves finally got so bad he couldn't take a shower because the water felt like pins pricking him. Then it happened: Jim had a **nervous breakdown**." ▲ As if the genre (and the artist) didn't have enough problems, **Dee Dee Ramone** has recorded a **rap song**. It's called "Funky Man," and we can only wonder who it's about; certainly not Dee Dee. ▲ Following the lead of Rolling Stone, SPIN has introduced **mandatory drug testing** of employees. Preliminary results are about what the rest of this issue would lead you to expect. 74% chose **domestic marijuana** over heroin and morphine, but 92% preferred **ganja** over all barbiturates; 82% could not distinguish between crack and **Jolt Cola**. In another **controlled** experiment, three editors on **LSD** wrote the same record reviews as they did after taking a placebo. ▲ **Tammy and Jim**, part two. Jim: "This so-called **holy war** must stop. If we have to, we'll hold up a **white flag** and say we surrender." Tammy: "That's the way it's gotta be. Somebody has gotta act like a **Christian!**" ▲ **Fear 1987**: How safe do you feel? From an otherwise routine press release announcing the **Run-D.M.C./Beastie Boys** summer tour: "Both groups tend to inspire **extreme excitement** in their fans. Accordingly, Rush Productions, which manages both acts, plans to take **extraordinary security precautions** on behalf of the tour. These include airport-styled metal detectors and a security team of six or more men from Contemporary Services, Inc. There is an in-depth questionnaire being sent to all venues, with all advance paperwork being sent by certified mail. Each venue will also be provided with a videotape on the right and wrong way to establish security for the Together Forever Tour." Now **how safe** do you feel? ▲ Joe Ely has signed to Hightone, Robert Cray's label, and cut an album called *Lord of the Highway*, to be released in mid July. ▲ **Signs o' the times**. In the UK, where the 7-inch single is still viable, the two **top-selling** singles artists for the first quarter of 1987 were **Ben E. King** and **Jackie Wilson**; Percy Sledge finished seventh. At press time in the U.S., **four** singles in the Top 50 were reissues, and **seven** of the Top 120 albums were **U2** albums. ▲

Nina Hagen puckers up with seventeen-year old fiance, Iroquois. A wild wedding is planned for August.

L.L. COOL J

IS BIGGER AND DEFERR!

Def Jam Summer '87 Tour

JUNE 17	COLUMBUS, GA
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JUNE 20	BALTIMORE, MD
JUNE 21	RICHMOND, VA
JUNE 25	MOBILE, AL
JUNE 26	NEW ORLEANS, LA
JUNE 27	BIRMINGHAM, AL
JUNE 28	NASHVILLE, TN
JULY 1	SAGINAW, MI
JULY 2	CHICAGO, IL
JULY 3	DETROIT, MI
JULY 4	LOUISVILLE, KY
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ON DEF JAM/COLUMBIA RECORDS, CASSETTES AND COMPACT DISCS.



HOT STUFF



Waring Abbott

Barry White was dying to do it, and if you couldn't tell, you weren't listening

Do a little dance.
Make a little love. Get
down tonight. C'mon, it'll
do you some good.

Hang a sign upon the door that says don't disturb this cross-cultural digression. Yeah.

In the northern Sudan—where they had to stop cutting the hands off thieves 'cause it was hurting the economy, but where Islamic penalties still include so many bites in the back and a kick in the head—if you have enough juice and maybe enough near-recent cassettes, you can have an audience with real royalty. Real tribal royalty, and they'll invite you into their homes and be very dignified and very, very African, and they'll wear beautiful, long flowing robes of impossible richness and variety. And beneath these robes, which look about the way you expected but so much more elaborate and inventive, you're confronted with that which you never ever expected. On the feet of these flamboyantly robed African men are these totally massive, totally cool platform shoes. And here in the Sudan, epiphany blasts you flat upside the head, just as clearly as if those platform shoes'd had go dfish in the heels.

It never died. Disco culture, that is. Punk didn't kill it, Doonesbury couldn't kill it, mel ow never even stood a chance. The Bee Gees and John Travolta wounded and embarrassed it, but then the disco juggernaut barely felt the bump as it rolled inevitably over their broken bodies. Thousands of anti-disco pyros, with perhaps a racist or homophobe or two in the bunch, tried burning it at Chicago's Comiskey Park, but only wasted their matches and cheated themselves out of the second game of the double-header. No other music has been cussed, beaten down, and left for dead like disco, and none has endured and even gone out and colonized with such tenacity.

And now, a decade and a half later, it doesn't take but a few seconds of the guitar intro to Shirley & Co.'s "Shame, Shame, Shame" or Jean Knight's "Mr. Big Stuff," or the liquid vamp of Ben E. King's "Supernatural Thing," to make clear—goldfish-in-heel clear—that the music has not only endured, but actually sounds better than ever. Viva Barry White! Jimmy Castor for president!

And you know that somewhere in the northern Su-

By Bart Bull and John Leland

Barry White served as a great libidinal liberational talisman, the mighty walrus of love.

dan—where they didn't have Richard Nixon and didn't need a youth culture happily purified of all meaning to provide a respite from one that insisted precisely on meaning—a patriarch entertains visitors in a white suit with lapels the size of surfboards and elephant bells the size of actual elephants. And maybe in order to get down, he's got to get in D, funky D, just like you. And perhaps he's even got the go dfish.

Disco lives. Play that funky music, white boy. Let's start the dance

"Kung Fu Fighting" by Carl Douglas

"Love's Theme" by the Love Unlimited Orchestra

I don't know what the deal with the wacka-wacka wah-wah rhythm riff was, whether it was sociological or what, but everybody had a whole bunch of 'em, and they always sounded almost exactly the same. Almost. Which was the point. "Kung Fu Fighting" had wacka-wacka wah-wah. "Love's Theme" by Barry White's mighty Love Unlimited Orchestra had wacka-wacka wah-wah. "Superfly" and "Theme from Shaft" both had wacka-wacka wah-wah, but they both had it for the same effect, for the cool-and-

sinister stroke. It was all-purpose, but it meant something different every time. That's (wacka-wacka) hip

"Fire" and "Love Rollercoaster" by the Ohio Players

Nothing—but *nothing* is better than "Love Rollercoaster." Except for "Fire." Which is better, sure, but mostly because it came first. And maybe also because "Fire" has the sirens on it. However, "Love Rollercoaster" has the greatest "say what?" in recorded history. Everyone used to walk around saying "say what?" all the time, but after "Love Rollercoaster," everyone worked real hard at saying "say what?" just like Sugar says it. That was as close as you could get to being an Ohio Player, but it was better than nothing.

"Car Wash" by Rose Royce

You could write a song about anything and have it work. Like work, for instance. "Car Wash" was just as good a theme from a cheap movie in its own way as "Superfly" or "Theme from Shaft," and that's saying

a lot. Had one of the first and the finest of clap tracks, had great strings, had great lyrics—"Talkin' 'bout the car wash/Car wash, yeah/C'mon y'all and sing it with me . . ." had a great, great singer. And for those with a need for social significance, work songs are an Afro-American cultural tradition. So there

"The Hustle" by Van McCoy

This is it. This is the piece of "disco" that was identified as disco before anybody outside discos knew what disco was. There were two different dances you could do that were both called The Hustle, and everybody did one or the other whenever they played "The Hustle." What got a lot of deep-thinkers disturbed about disco was they'd see everybody on the dance floor doing the New York Hustle together in unison, and then the next thing you'd know, there'd be some deeply thoughtful essay about how this signified mindless fascism in motion. If the deep-thinkers were well-read, they'd mention Leni Riefenstahl. What they never mentioned, maybe because they never noticed, was that the more strictly people danced in unison, the more their individuality, their own sense of grace and style and all that good stuff, came clearly across

"I'm Gonna Love Ya Just a Little More Baby," "You're the First, the Last, My Everything," by Barry White

You could tell that Barry White was just dying to do it. Take my word for it—you could tell. If you couldn't tell, you weren't listening, because he kept telling you he was dying to do it. You knew he meant it too, it's just that you didn't necessarily want to have to watch. The great thing, though, about Barry White was that he served as some kind of great libidinal liberational talisman, as the mighty walrus of LOVE. LOVE was Barry's thing, his obsession, his reason for existence. Probably still is, for that matter; you don't get as tightly focused on something like LOVE as Barry White without staying that way for a long, long, long time. Maybe by now Barry's had to develop hobbies or something, but I'd bet he still spells LOVE L-O-V-E. Slowly.

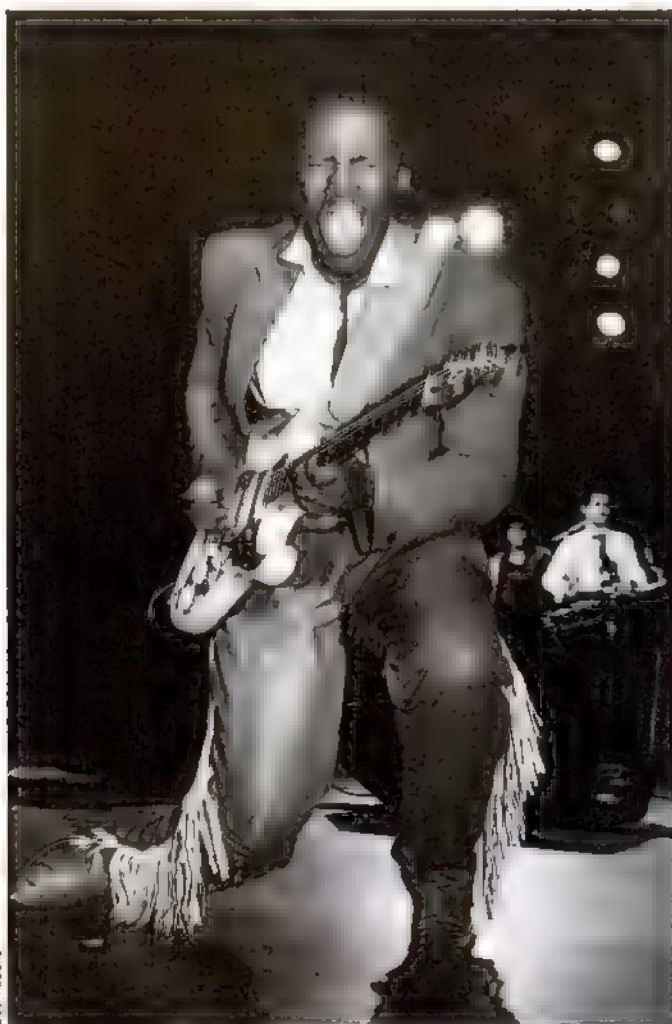
"Get Down Tonight," "(Shake, Shake, Shake) Shake Your Booty," "That's the Way I Like It" by K.C. & the Sunshine Band

K.C. & the Sunshine Band were everything that was wrong about disco, right? You can still make jokes about K.C. & the Sunshine Band and everybody will get the concept instantly, will basically understand that it's about how lame and boring the '70s were. But the best thing is that as soon as the laughter dies, you can put on any of the K.C. & the Sunshine Band hits like "That's the Way I Like It" and before the first dozen "uh-huh, uh-huh"s have gone by, you can see minds reeling in revisionism. All groove and made to move, this is the kind of stuff that turned party into a verb.

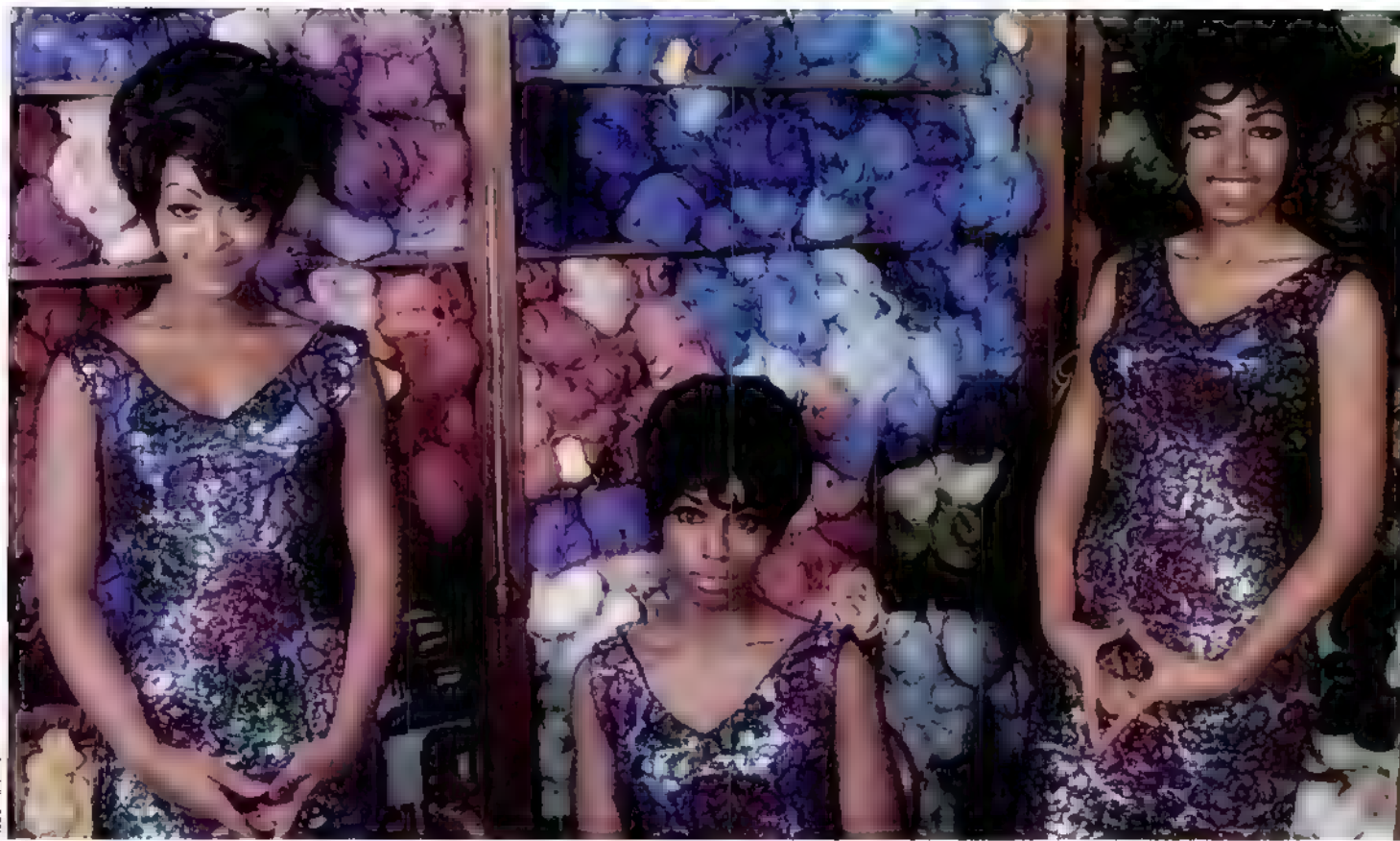
"More, More, More" by the Andrea True Connection

I was talking to somebody just recently who knew some guys who played on this record. In other words, there actually was an Andrea True Connection. Which seems a little like a revelation to me. Andrea True was a porn star—sadly, I never saw her work—and "More, More, More" was about her career choice. It was a hit, too; the lyrics had her singing in

Right: Nile Rodgers was a big freak, maybe even the freak of the week. Opposite page: The Three Degrees: maybe the reason people hated them so much was that they were scary. Maybe not.



Everett Roberts



this breathy little voice about how if you want to know how she really feels, get the cameras rollin', get the action goin'. Debbie Harry would work the same stick to death with Blondie, but that time around it was considered a lot cooler because it was punk rock.

"Do It ('Til You're Satisfied)" by the B.T. Express

There used to be a gang of kids from the projects down south on Broadway in my hometown, the same funky Broadway that Dyke & the Blazers were singing about back in the mid-'60s. These kids were all about ten or twelve or fourteen, rode little chopped low-rider bicycles, and about half of them were holding handguns at any given time. They called themselves the B.T. Express after their favorite band, the band that told you over and over that you should do it, do it, do it, go on and do it 'til you're satisfied. But they never said what it was.

"Pick Up the Pieces," "Cut the Cake" by the Average White Band

Another great thing about the whole era is that there was evidence sometimes that even white people could be funky if they worked at it.

"Fly Robin, Fly" by the Silver Convention

This is the type of thing that people were talking about when they said disco was mindless.

Fly, robin, fly
Fly, robin, fly
Fly, robin, fly
Up, up to the sky

That's it. That's all there was, just an anonymous

chorus of voices, a lot of strings, and the beat. And the curious thing is that it was actually pretty transcendental. Maybe you didn't want to spend the rest of your life wherever it was that it sent you to (which is the way it sometimes seemed once disco became institutionalized), but it was okay for a quick visit.

"Superfly," "Future Shock," "Give, Get, Take and Have" by Curtis Mayfield

What I'd really like to know is what happened with Curtis Mayfield's hormones. "Superfly," it goes without saying, is as good as anything gets, and "Future Shock" may not have been anywhere near as good, but it had the exact same number of syllables so he could sing it exactly the same as "Superfly" and even mention, in the midst of a number of helpful suggestions about cleaning up the environment and the ghettos and our minds, all those folks out there dancin' the Superfly. But after a few years of focusing on the world's troubling troubles, he suddenly got horny as moose antlers. His own records, like "Give, Get, Take and Have," and the records he produced for Mavis Staples, are sex.

"For the Love of Money" by the O'Jays
"When Will I See You Again" by the Three Degrees

Another thing that this music was good at doing was capturing ineffable moments. The opening echoes of "Money" make a noise exactly like what's going on inside your brain when the rent is due and the mailman's just brought a bunch of overdue bills. And "When Will I See You Again" is this lovely, wistful little instant of bittersweet romance, with strings

that swoop like an elegant heartbreak. I think one reason a lot of people hated this music was it scared them too much.

"Funky Stuff," "More Funky Stuff," "Jungle Boogie," "Hollywood Swinging" by Kool and the Gang

It's incredible—these tunes all came out one after another within just a few months. I'm probably wrong, but it seems like they all came out in the summer of 1974, right alongside "Rock Your Baby" and "Rock the Boat" and the Ohio Players' "Skin Tight" and "Come and Get Your Love" by Redbone and "I'll Take You There" by the Staple Singers—life can't get any better than that if it has to be so damn hot outside.

"Rock the Boat" by the Hues Corporation

It hardly ever mattered what the people who made the records looked like—the Ohio Players and James Brown and Isaac Hayes were big exceptions; Barry White was a big, big exception—partly because you never got much of a chance at seeing them. Most of them didn't actually play live shows, and a lot of them never even got to be on their own album covers. "Rock the Boat" was such a big hit, though, and so smooth and cool and easy, that the Hues Corporation were on TV constantly for about a year after the hit had finally cooled down. And the guy who was the lead singer always always wore a hippie-style headband. Right across the exact same part of his forehead. Real low. There was every reason to believe he had some type of extremely distasteful wart or horribly unsightly growth that he was covering up. We may never know.

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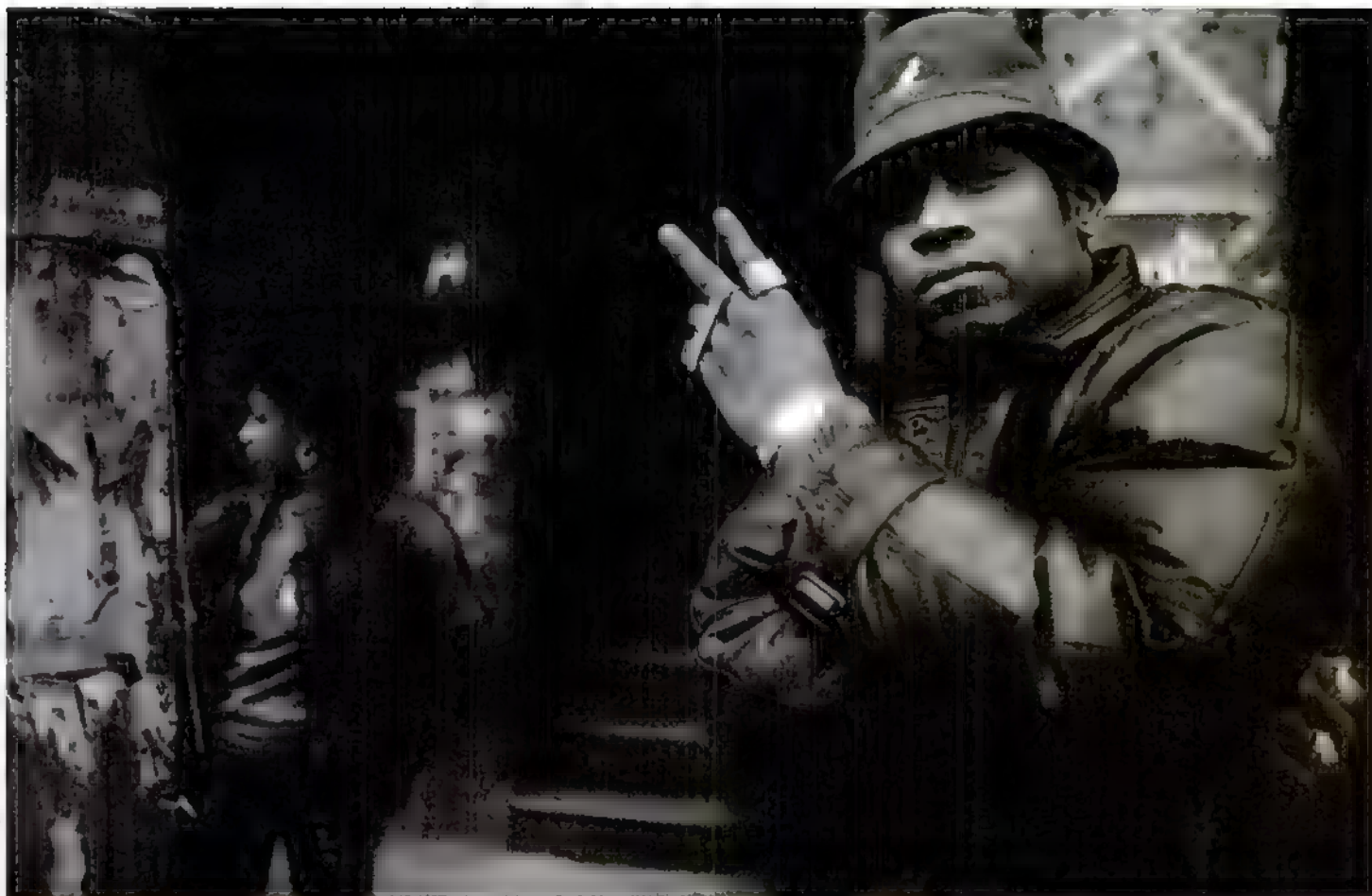
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SPINS

Platter du Jour

L.L. Cool J
Bigger And Deffer
 Def Jam

L.L. Cool J,
 Penguin Cafe
 Orchestra,
 David Thomas
 and the
 Woodenbirds,
 Neil Young,
 Godfathers, X,
 Warren Zevon,
 Spin-Offs

I wear the black and red City Wings and I can play with guys who bought this record the day it came out, but I don't kid myself: mine is the white man's game. Twenty-foot set shots and obnoxious D. Nope, little girls chide me when I accidentally wear my Raising Hell T-shirt and my Ponys at the same time; I live in a neighborhood where the hoodlums do things like cover parked cars with tree branches; and when I say "yo" in a serious context, I smile like a fool. I am white and, for all the white hipsters who call rap's white middle-class fans Crow Jims, happy enough about that. I love rock 'n' roll. This record is as black as a Def Jam sleeve. And it's arguably the heaviest rock 'n' roll record ever released on a major label.

"I want to take my gun and shoot you in your motherfucking face." Sheeee. And this on the requisite socially responsible track. This is, well, it's irresponsible! There's a riot going on!

Of sorts. After reading a *People* mag piece on the "young legend in leather," the gun in the motherfucking face seems a little more figurative than we white people might imagine it to be in, say, Schoolly-D. That ain't to say this isn't intense, malevolent, and misogynist enough to coax a flaming turd flood out of Tipper Gore should her crew ever get to pure "black" music. This is a record to provoke, shall we say, unsavory action. Not the beer-soaked Beastie-ality—the

gun's more real than that.

Mr. J forgoes the Run-D.M.C. route for a crossover hit: the only rifting on *Bigger and Deffer*, the bwangggg monolithic minor chords that power "Go Cut Creator Go," owe little to FM metal. The song *ought* to be a hit—the spliced-in Chuck Berry licks jolt like they must've thirty years ago, and Chuck Berry, shoot, he had hits—but it's black; black like Eddie Murphy bringing a friend of his on the Carson show to do a bad imitation of Prince when Johnny wanted to cut to a commercial. (Johnny at least knew what to do. laugh along or be an asshole.)

Bigger and Deffer is tricky. The do-Run-D.M.C.-one-lesser sound of the Radio album is fired out here. The beat is still Cher to Cool J's Sonny, and "Kanday" and "My Rhyme Ain't Done" are stark as a moonscape. But in other places Cut Creator is allowed to flash Sidekick Earl ranks on a mike for once. *Bigger and Deffer* is as much a party album as it is about hard rock thud. A party where the refreshments are lethal in big doses and the favors will blow your foot off if you pick them up wrong. A party to which all the important people are invited: Johnny B. Goode, Blowfly, Mickey Mouse, the Godfather of Soul, John Shaft, the Moonglows, Jimi Hendrix—they're all here, at least in spirit—making punchy cameos, like those people who popped out of the wall at Laugh-In parties

to tell brief, bluntly bad jokes

L.L. Cool J, a kid himself but already one of the great self-aggrandizers in rock history, is a good host. He power raps his braggadocio through the jagged sounds as fluidly and smartly as a scat singer oobie-oo-aw-ing over tinkling jazz piano. Now, that sounds purply, like a *Sports Illustrated* passage about Steepy Floyd, but I must define things in Caucasian terms. You are probably white. And like I said, the guys I play basketball with aren't going to wait for a *SPIN* review to see whether or not to buy this sucker. They'll more likely have heard the single "I'm Bad" with its funky Isaac Hayes wahwahing, police radio static, and bass line repeat and figured, sure, he is bad.

So, will the tough guys in my little neck of Caucasia frisbee to this as they did immediately to the Beasties and, mucho belatedly, to Run-D.M.C.? Will they throw beer cans at each other to this banter of chocolate and cherries, .357s, and Queens whores servicing Japanese businessmen with steamed glasses? Turn a deaf ear, or turn a deaf ear? I won't worry about it; that's not what's important. What's important is that L.L.'s brand of noise is the only poetry that means much anymore and the only sort of rock 'n' roll that totally kicks ass. Now, my Ponys say it's time to be wandering.

—Don Howland

Penguin Cafe Orchestra Signs of Life Editions E.G.

A friend of mine thinks Penguin Cafe Orchestra sounds like Philip Glass would if he was a Brit who did mushrooms. That's an OK place to start, actually. In reality, the PCO is an ever-changing group of musicians (trained in rock, classical, or jazz) who make instrumental music of unusual wit under the leadership of Simon Jeffes. They (or he, or it) have released five records in 11 years, records filled to the brim with saucy fantasias, sweeping string arrangements, and a lot of stuff that sounds like the world's greatest jug band in space.

What saves the music from becoming terminal E.G. ambient drone are Jeffes's sizable knacks. The guy loves to ditz around with exotic polyrhythms and layered production, so that listening to a good PCO track is like watching a well-staged farce: you never know who's going to pop through what door. Better yet, Jeffes composes melodies that range from the ingratiatingly dinky to the massively gorgeous.

Signs of Life, the PCO's latest, seems to represent a sea change of a sort. Bad news first: Jeffes has spoken in interviews of wanting to make the music "darker" and "nearer the edge." Great idea, but the effect is to blunt the off-the-wall humor that makes the Orchestra so great (remember that this is the guy who orchestrated Sid Vicious's cover of "My Way," and Penguinized the Ventures' "Walk, Don't Run" with

a full string section). For the first time, a Penguin Cafe album actually has a few boring cuts, the type of flaccid mantra-muzak that they're usually expert at sidestepping.

The good news is that even if *Signs of Life* is a little short on wit, it's still a fine record. Beginners are directed to "Bean Fieds" and "Dirt," Penguin-music at its most irresistibly boinky, and the rest of us can bask in the lovely "Rosasolis," the kindergarten raga "Horns of the Bull," and the rollicking, nostalgic "Southern Jukebox Music." There's a dissonant highland jig called "Swing the Cat," and a stately, wheezing "Oscar Tango."

The production is clear and deep, but clarity doesn't get in the way of the gleeful, thoughtful messiness that's Jeffes's hallmark. Even at its most sober, this is a deepy happy record. What's sad is that Simon Jeffes doesn't make them more often.

—Ty Burr

David Thomas and the Woodenbirds *Blame the Messenger* Twin/Tone

Pretty neat that David Thomas, the big guy who used to shriek for that ultimate Dada-in-the-face-of-industry combo

Pere Ubu, would write an ode to his beloved home base Cleveland—and with the same title as the Michael Stanley Band's ode to their beloved home base, Cleveland. Not so neat that the Michael Stanley Band's "My Town" is the better ode (grittier, less solipsistic, more unexpected). But no matter: On the rest of Thomas's latest collection of jagged declamations, he waits and flails harder than he has since Ubu's 1980 *The Art of Walking*. Back then, the former Crocus Behemoth was in the process of pledging his soul to Jehovah, which somehow made him real optimistic, which somehow turned his music into featherweight, late-progressive symphonic folk. Artful and animated and "interesting," of course, but then

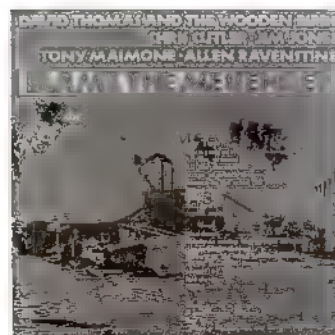
so was Jethro Tull.

No hype labels it as such, but *Blame the Messenger* appears to be Thomas's long-forecasted return to rock, or at least to the dolorous musique concrète noise-scaping of old. No demiclassical cellos or tripe like that; there's some accordion, but mainly just in the two sea shanties (or whatever) that Thomas himself wrote. Mostly we get solidly clattering bass/guitar/drums/synth from a half Ubu-alumni backing quartet whose increased composing contribution has led to ominous low-down dub, layered bopmetal improv, and the kind of rubbing, rattling, squeaking cacophony unveiled on Ubu's 1978 debut, *The Modern Dance*.

Thomas is still mystified by Mom Nature, so the LP's explicit theme—change—is spelled out with lotsa the usual whimsical metaphors. But *Blame the Messenger* isn't as cheerfully childish as most '80s Thomas products. "The way it is is bound to change/The way it is is bound in chains," Dave moans, and could be he's finally realized that you can't escape the devil outside by locking yourself in your bedroom with your monsters. Fact is, sometimes you gotta fight back.

—Chuck Eddy

Simon Jeffes of PCO



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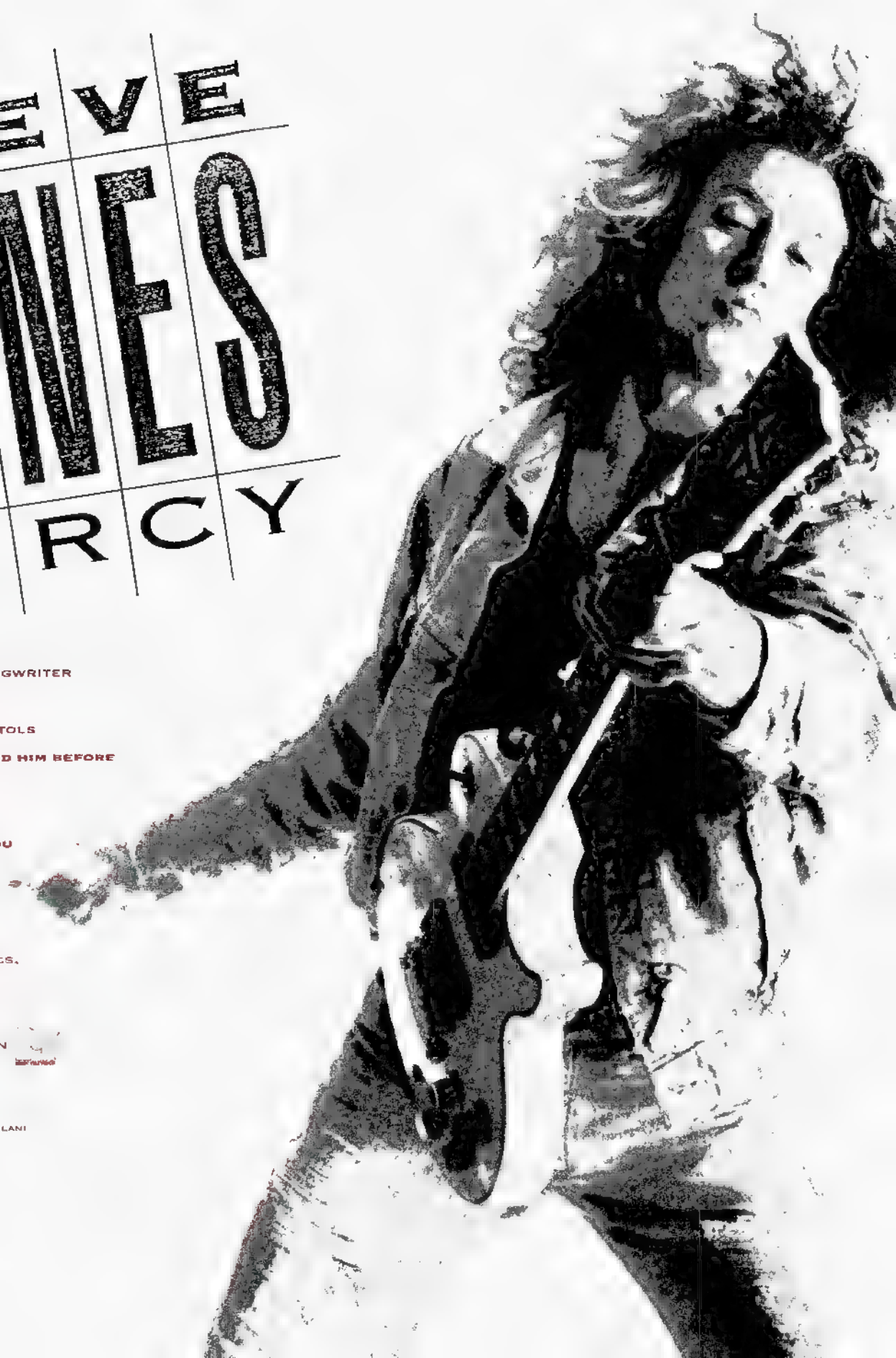
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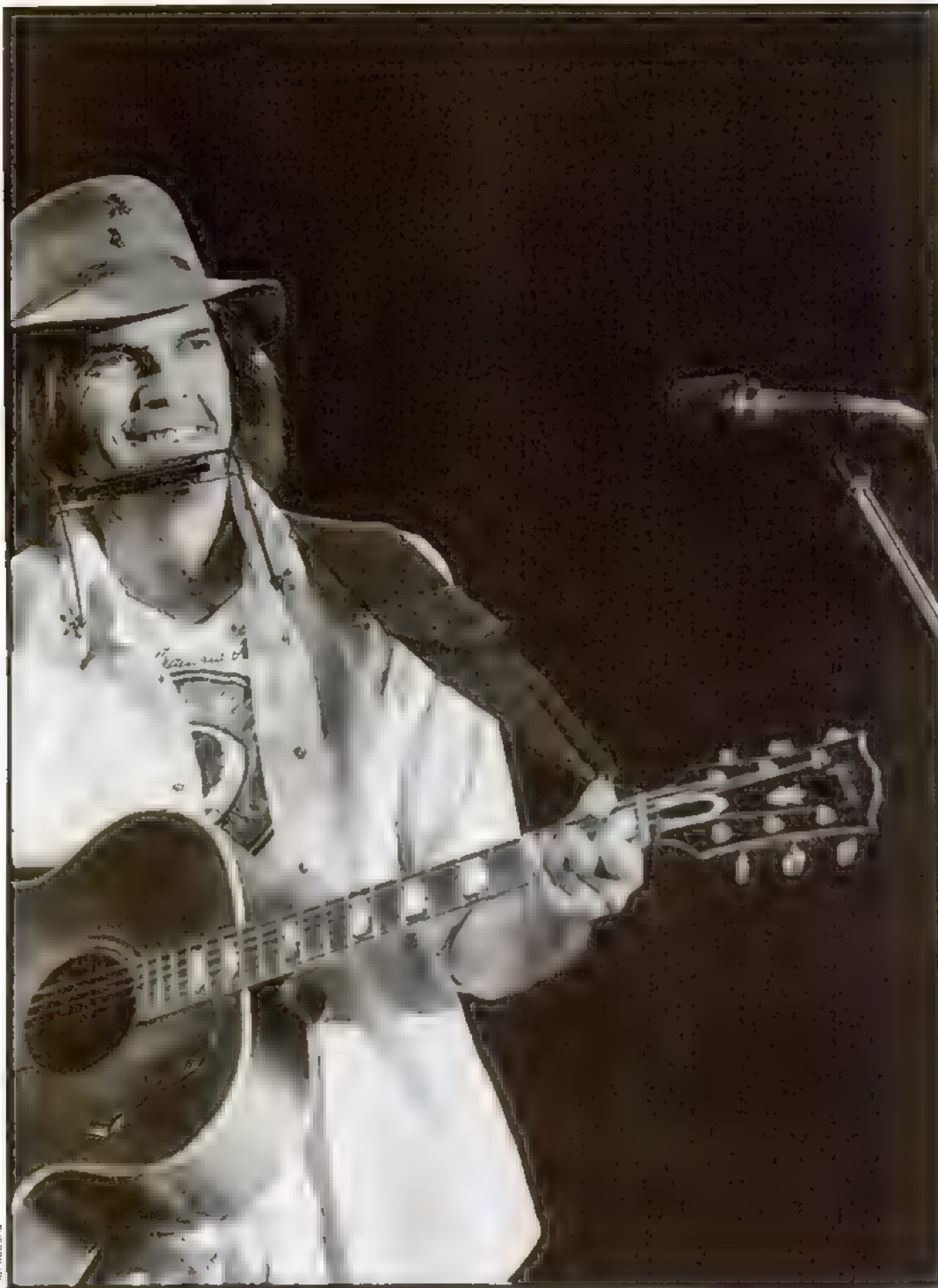
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Fraser Roberts

Neil Young Life Geffen

I don't know about you, but when I'm looking for trenchant analysis of one or another of today's unutterably complex political issues, I reach for the latest record by some rock star. Like Neil Young, for instance. As far back as "Southern Man," Neil was offering

thoughtful solutions to our nation's centuries-old racial conflict:

*Southern man, better keep your head
Don't forget what your good book said*

Of course, Neil's a lot older now, and he's smoked a lot more pot. A lot more. A lot. A lot more pot. What were we talking about? OK, Neil Young. He's got

another new album out—that makes 26 or 27 for this decade alone—and on it he daringly dives headfirst into some of the more baffling international issues of our day. Ever see somebody dive headfirst into a swimming pool they thought was full of water, only it turns out it wasn't?

Neil's not exactly all that sure what it is he wants to say about the Middle East, but he goes ahead and says it just the same. He's big on being enigmatic any-

Left: Neil Young is big on
enigma. Right: The
Godfathers (l-r, Mike
Gibson, George Mazar, Peter
Coyne, Kris Dollimore, and
Chris Coyne; reinvent rock 'n'
roll all over again

way, and it sure sounds profound—he uses more gunfire for percussion on his first two songs than you'd ordinarily find on an entire Big Audio Dynamite LP. On "Long Walk Home," he sort of gathers it all up into one big epiphanous non-syntactical nutshell.

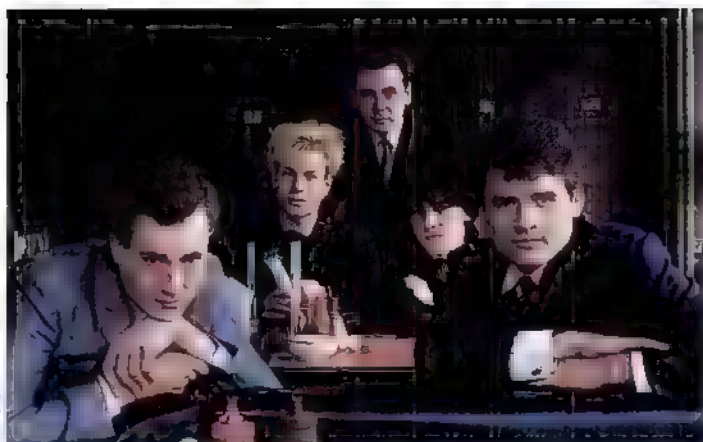
*From Vietnam to old Beirut
If we are searching for the truth
Why do we feel that double-
edged blade
Cutting through our hand?
America, America
[a comparatively small mortar
round explosion here]
Where have we gone?*

Okay, I would admit that Neil's not at his absolute best here, that it kind of makes Little Steven seem listenable, that it's not all that likely to be reprinted verbatim in *The Nation* or *The New Republic*. (Then again, I've seen stuff in those places about rock stars like Bruce Springsteen and David Byrne too silly to be printed on a Neil Young lyric sheet, and that's real silly.) But there are actually some areas that Neil can be said to know some actual something about, like what it's like to be the first rock star to be sued by his own record company for being an uncommercial weirdo. That's a subject Neil ought to be able to gnaw on with some considerable authority, right? So here goes

*People tell us that we play too
loud
But they don't know what our
music's about
We never listen to the record
company man
They try to change us and ruin
our band
That's why we don't wanna be
good*

Well, something that Neil really knows a lot about is being lonely, and all the rest of the songs are about just that. They're maybe not the best lonesome songs Neil's ever done, they're maybe not even in the upper fiftieth percentile of the three or four hundred songs that Neil's done that have the word "lonely" in them. But they do sound just like Neil Young singing about being lonely, and if there weren't some kind of market for that kind of thing, I can't imagine record company men would keep giving the guy record contracts, considering what an uncommercial weirdo he is. Besides, Neil's always been somewhat of a hit or-miss kind of guy. He brings out an album or two that's good, has a couple of songs on it that are real good. Then he brings out a dozen or two of the other kind. Like this one

—Bart Bull



The Godfathers Hit by Hit Link Records

Once upon a time, in 1967, there was an English band of ultra-Mods known as the Creation. Contemporaries of the Who, the Yardbirds, and the Move, the Creation never achieved the commercial success or Anglo-American renown of those groups. In fact, the Creation never released a proper album (i.e., songs recorded in continuous session), only compilations of singles: furious, flashy three-minute wonders like "Painter Man," "Making Time," and "Try and Stop Me," all produced by Shel Talmy (who also produced the early Kinks and Who records).

I wasn't there, but I'm willing to bet that in their time and at their peak, the Creation were one of the most exciting rock 'n' roll bands in England.

Once upon a time, in 1977, there was a New York band of slap-happy substance abusers called the Heartbreakers. I don't mean those Petty prisses, either, but the Johnny Thunders Heartbreakers, with Walter Lure on second guitar and Jerry Nolan on drums. Their musical *modus operandi*—akin to stomping Chuck Berry's "Too Much Monkey Business" to a bloody pulp and dragging it from the bumper of a battered Chevy at 110 mph—was captured on one classic slab of studio murk, *L.A.M.E.*, and a couple of ferocious live discs before the Heartbreakers crumpled into the gutter from where they'd arisen.



I was there, and I can say with certainty that in their time and at their peak, the Heartbreakers were one of the most exciting rock 'n' roll bands in America.

At the start of Memorial Day weekend, I went to see the Godfathers in New York, and damn if they didn't come on like some heavenly cross between the Creation and the Heartbreakers. This could be the best English hard rock band (not metal or thrash, but *hard rock*) since the heyday of the Clash and the Jam, and the best hard rock band from anywhere since the Replacements.

In Kris Dollimore, the Godfathers have a new guitar god for all those who worship at the altar of Berry, Thunders, and Wayne Kramer; and in Peter Coyne a front man who overcomes his vocal limitations through sheer intensity. There is absolutely nothing "new" about the Godfathers' music, or even their schoolboy-Mod image (all slim ties, button-down shirts, and dark blazers). It's just the "same old shit" made shockingly new all over again, rock 'n' roll reinvented for the 2,000th time, in case you've forgotten what it sounds like.

Hit by Hit isn't a proper album, but a collection of singles previously released on the Godfathers' own Link label. Not surprisingly, it plays like my copy of *The Creation*, '66-'67—explosive bursts without much flow or dynamics, and nothing even resembling a ballad. My favorite tracks are the opening stab of intent, "I Want Everything," a 12-bar tune called "Can't Leave Her Alone," which brings the entire British R&B tradition to sudden, slashing life; and a three-alarm instrumental, "John Barry," a film-music theme set to a guitar arrangement of molten steel. The only weak spot is their cover of "Cold Turkey." It's got good intentions and considerable torque, but Lennon's record is one of those once-in-a-lifetime-thank-God performances that effectively resists all interpretation.

This is not the ultimate Godfathers record. That one will go much further in capturing the group's dense, barbed wall of sound and may even capitalize on their considerable vocal potential (four singers!). But for the moment, *Hit by Hit* will do nicely, thank you.

—Andy Schwartz



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X See How We Are Elektra

Remember when you hated groups like Fleetwood Mac because they lived in L.A. and sold millions of records? Remember when you loved groups like X because they lived in L.A. and hated Fleetwood Mac? Back then, you did things on principle. Nowadays, no one hates "old farts" and loves "punk" on principle because there are no principles left in pop music. Nowadays, the new Fleetwood Mac LP sounds avant garde and the new X LP sounds like the same old strum.

X started out as the anti-Fleetwood

Mac, but the two were more similar than anyone would admit. The women and men of both groups would trade back and forth contrasting opinions about love, usually in a pretty depressing way. X were faster and angrier. Fleetwood Mac had more melody and made prettier noises. Both bands could have used a little of what each other had in surplus, but you can't have everything.

On this new LP, X don't sound like much of anything. The only distinctive instrumentalist in X was Billy Zoom, and now that he's gone, X makes music that's strictly brand X. If they sold it in supermarkets, it would have a white label on it, like all the food in *Repo Man*. If I were a repo man, I would repossess X's equipment and not give it back until

they got rid of Tony Gilkyson, their new guitarist, learned something about rhythm, and found a decent producer.

Since parting company with Ray Manzarek, X have made flat-sounding records. On the last one, *Ain't Love Grande!*, they had an excuse. That one was overseen by Michael Wagener, who makes records with their labelmates, Dokken. You'd think they'd be more careful this time. But their new producer, Alvin Clarke, makes this one sound like the last. Not once does X sound brilliant, shining, and nasty. Not once does the music go bang.

I used to think Exene Cervenka and John Doe were great songwriters. But now that X sound like some sludgy metal band through earplugs, it's hard to listen

to them long enough to tell. The two things Cervenka and Doe still excel at are lyric writing and dueting. Sometimes their lyrics and deliveries are so good that they can trick you into listening closely to this stuff. They've got an evocative way with places and characters and can capture the frustrations of relationships at least as good as Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam, which is OK by me. But no matter what they sing about here, they sound desperate and sad, I guess that puts limitations on what emotional ground they can cover, and it's why they're stuck in a rut with no way out. Maybe they should go into group therapy with Fleetwood Mac and form a super supergroup.

—Barry Walters



Warren Zevon
Sentimental Hygiene
Virgin

In 1969, while the Beatles were at Abbey Road in England recording, "Boy, you're gonna carry that weight a long time," a young and aspiring singer-songwriter named Warren Zevon was in a Los Angeles studio pulling the finishing touches on his debut album, *Wanted—Dead or Alive*. A most 20 years later, there are movie-producing Beatles, wine cooler commercial-making Beatles, and, yes, even dead Beatles. Warren Zevon, however, continues to simply lumber along, carrying that weight. *Sentimental Hygiene* is his first new album in 5 years, and after listening to it I can honestly say that it's as if he never left. I only wish I meant that as a compliment.

The weight Zevon keeps carrying is, of course, life itself—which, according to his songs over the years, tends to be inescapably cruel ("Excitable Boy"), hard ("Poor Poor, Pitiful Me"), and terrifying ("Lawyers, Guns, and Money"). It is, in fact, so cruel and hard and terrifying that sometimes—heck, most of the time—the best way to deal with it is to laugh at its absurdities ("Werewolves of London") and hope it goes away. Now while some of us might find this worldview somewhat, er, limiting in terms of fulfilling the human experience, Zevon seems unable—and, what's most indefensible, unwilling—to abandon it over the course of even just one

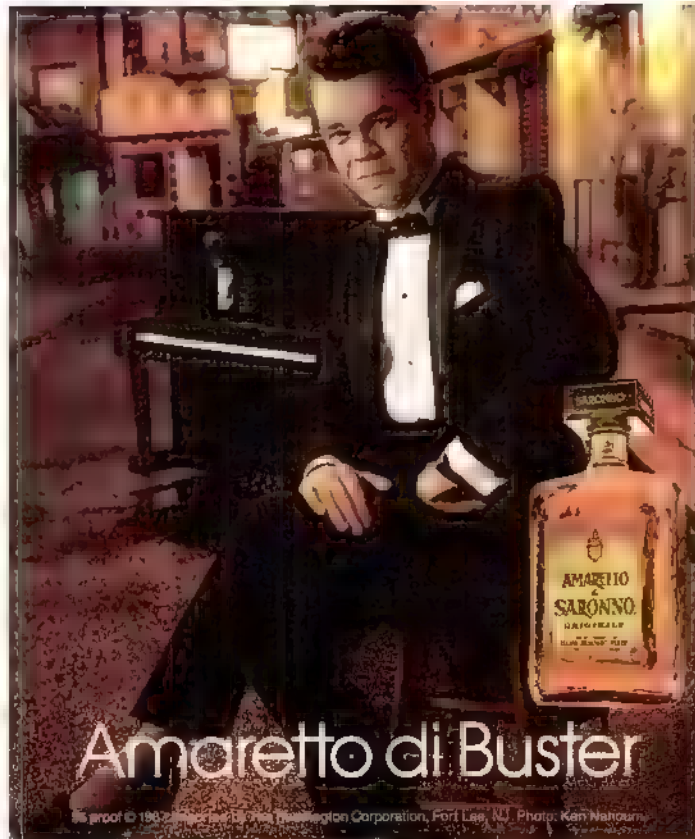
itty-bitty song. Ultimately, this infuses almost every track on *Sentimental Hygiene* with the same repetitive message: "Life is hell and I can't deal with it, ain't that funny?" Given Zevon's well-documented battles with alcohol, I was half-expecting to find a tune somewhere on this record entitled "Addicted to Irony."

As it is, all the paraphernalia is certainly here, in the form of both lyrical and musical bad jokes. Take "The Factory," which finds a folkie Zevon belting forth Springsteenishly on the subject of blue-collar workers. "Early in the morning I feel a chill/The factory whistle blows loud and clear/I'd kill my wife or she'd kill me/But we're too busy working at the factory," he sings, while an acoustic guitar strums and a harmonica—played by (who else?) Bob Dylan—wafts away in the background. Or maybe "Bad Karma" ("Was it something I did in another life? I try and try but nothing comes out right"), which comes complete with finger cymbals, sitar, and chanting. And then there's "Leave My Monkey Alone," a tale of the early '50s Mau Mau uprisings as seen from the resigned point of view of an English nobleman and presented via a nice, funk-filled, George Clinton arranged beat.

Even the presence of R.E.M.'s Peter Dinklage, Mike Mills, and Bill Berry—as well as guest spots by Neil Young, David Lindley, and Jennifer Warnes—does little to alleviate the fatigue of the material. But what's most irksome is Zevon's complete and undivided self-absorption in his own woes. Both "Delox Mansion" and "Trouble Waiting to Happen" take as subject matter his drinking problems, and "Even a Dog Can Shake Hands" is about Zevon's financial troubles at the hands of vultures. But there's nary an insight in sight. Even the one unarguably good song on this album, a moving ballad called "Reconsider Me," focuses on his screw-ups, not the person he's hurt. It's only the track's beautiful melody (and Don Henley's haunting harmony vocal) that keeps it from sinking in the pool of self-pity.

And people give Neil Diamond a hard time

Billy Altman



SPIN-OFFS

SWING OUT SISTER *It's Better to Travel* (PolyGram) Tired of taking cold showers until the next Sade LP? Try this. Corinne Drewery, the Nice British Bird of 1987, pretends she's the Girl from Ipanema while a pair of Magazine and A Certain Ratio vets lay down the funky-smooth daz-dazz disco jazz. Self-conscious Brit soul record of the year.

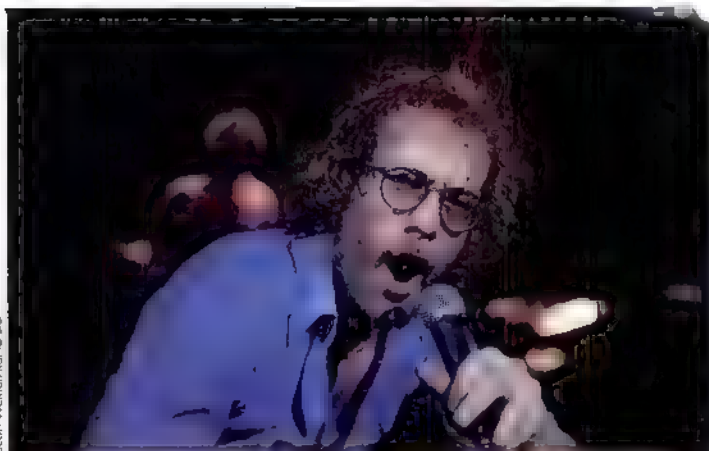
dirty pop genre. Sadly, *Tiny Days* backs off from the ground won by 1986's near masterpiece of an EP, "High Octane Revival." Blame the trendy arrangements, the production that mooshes everything into sound alike sludge, and the lyrics, which wimp out sourly. Then search out the EP and hope for better things next time.

SONIC YOUTH *Sister* (SST) You can look at Sonic Youth's ascent to subcultural godhead this way: as the underground scene got increasingly more stupid, Sonic Youth made a virtue of its own stupidity. From *Confusion Is Sex* to the Manson obsession to "Into the Groovy," the band has transcended art and noise and drugs and taken it to the stage on sheer dumbness alone. On *Sister*, a fairly bald and commendable pop move, they try to mix the nonsense with real rock tunage, and fail commendably flat. No riffs here and without the sonic confusion, the band's previously inspired fuzzy thinking just sounds fuzzy.

THE HARD-ONS *The Hard-Ons* (Big Time) They look like Redd Kross worshipers, and you hope they're young as they still want to burp on the record and call themselves the Hard-Ons. This is basically late-'70s poppy punk rock, with some of the '80s variety thrown in. If you like the trashed pop of the Hoodoo Gurus and Celibate Rifles you might wanna listen to it.

MÖTLEY CRÜE *Girls, Girls, Girls* (Elektra) The inside sleeve states: "All songs written September 3–26, 1986." Three weeks. They had three years and they wrote all the songs in three weeks! What they wrote seems destined to finally bury the idea of the Crüe being a metal act. They now sound like a rock 'n' roll boogie-woogie band, and a pretty lame one at that.

SCRUFFY THE CAT *Tiny Days* (Relativity) The hope here was that a Boston-based five piece could sing ehandedly resurrect and transcend the bar band.



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SINGLES

Column by John Leland

Jesus and Mary Chain: "April Skies" b/w "Kill Surf City" & "Who Do You Love" (Blanco Y Negro import)

Shorn of their corny feedback, the most interesting British pop band since God knows whom presents itself through the next veneer of corniness. Which isn't the neo-Tommy James and the Shondells pop tunage but the not entirely trustworthy naïveté of the lyrics: lines like "Hand in hand in a violent life / Making love on the edge of a knife" are followed by and mediated by the ready-made pop cliché "And the world comes tumbling down." Again, the Jesus and Mary Chain doesn't seem to be controlling the corn as much as making you hear them against it or through it. They aid the process on "April Skies" by orchestrating the thing to an unmotivated (and un-Ramonesish) crescendo. By not acknowledging their own corn, they reassert rather than reinvent the pop song; for them, the old homilies of "Happy Together" or "I Think We're Alone Now" or "Leader of the Pack" still apply. Either that or the band is just really, really corny. And this wouldn't make the A-side of this EP any less killer or the B-side any more compelling.

Pontiac Brothers: "Be Married Song" & "Doll Hut" b/w "Brenda's Mom" & "Dirty Deeds (Done Dirt Cheap)" (Frontier)

If love is a battlefield, marriage is the final frontier. Ward Dotson entreats his squeeze that she needs someone like him who'll knock her up and knock her down and kick her out, reminding her that the party never ends. Hank Williams assayed marriage in this light, but never from the position of a single man. And though Dotson's guitar never slices and grinds like it did on that first Gun Club album, these words uttered in anger recall the old specificity of bile. Fortunately, marriage is better than this song. Unfortunately, the other three songs on the EP aren't as good.

Stacy Q: "Insecurity" (Atlantic)

From the first, before the music comes in, Stacy Q's a cappella plaint "Where are you tonight?" gets fucked with by the production, so that it comes out "Where are you to-to-to-ni-ni-night." No wonder she's insecure. As much as Max Headroom, Stacy Q says things which of themselves aren't as interesting as the ways in which they are manipulated. For all of the incredible sex she seems to be having and giving on "Two of Hearts," "We Connect," and "Insecurity," she interests us more in her man than herself. She exists only as the changes he puts her through or the



explosion she experiences when they connect; he is the mythic being with the mythic powers. Her music speaks imperatively (as in fuck me) rather than discursively, like that of, say, Jody Watley or Lisa Lisa. Which may explain its immediacy; or maybe it makes her invisible, and her hard hooks and beats are what's immediate. Either way, this is her third brilliant slice of ephemera.

King Doe-V: "Shamalama" (Fresh)

The spoken word reduced to rhyming nonsense. When King Doe-V raps, don't matter what he's talking about, every line rhymes with the title. Which conceptual purity leads to lines like, "First let me wet my whistle with a sip of Tropicana," demonstrating that even in near-dadaist wordplay our language veers toward brand names. This is a song about a fight, but from its infectiously playful spirit, you'd never know it.

Big Stick: "Crack Attack" EP (Buy Our Records)

Title track raps (and raps is the word) unsupported narratives of crack as a racial phenomenon, putting Big Stick, whose charms rest in their massive Tina Turner wigs and consistent willingness to do the wrong thing, in dangerous waters. Rest of the record they find irrelevant intensity where they can get it, and they have and give good fun. Though not as crucial as last year's "Hell on Earth" EP, this is again music that announces itself as pop even as its dissonance denies this claim. Meaning that it shares the shit-noise with you rather than attacking you with it. And that you don't have to be an art wanker to wish you had a Tina Turner wig, too.

Strafe: "Outlaw" (A&M)

Obsessive cultist Steven Standard makes an obsessive popist single (which means that the references and witticisms announce themselves outright rather than informing the arch texture of the mix), and though it works as a hard, three-note dance groove, it'll never have the hermetic, polymorphous charm of "Set It Off." For all its pop smarts, "Outlaw" seems grounded by reality in a way that "Set It Off" never did; this sounds more like the work of someone who goes to bed at night and wakes up in the morning. Which isn't to say that it condescends, just that it delivers a good time rather than "Set It Off"'s annihilation of time.

Skinny Puppy: "Stairs and Flowers" b/w "Chainsaw" & "Assimilate" (Capitol)

What is Skinny Puppy? On the LP version of "Stairs and Flowers," the band seems a mediaphobia/paranoia ensemble with a digital sampler and a beat box, spewing out found messages that are rendered indecipherable by the distortion inherent in the stuff they're made of. A grimly effective but in the end predictable demonstration that the medium is the whachamacallit. On Justin Strauss and Murray Elias's "Def Wish Mix," the samples work as percussive devices, making the band rather than the media responsible for their lack of articulation, and transforming rather than denying their utility. All of which means that Strauss and Elias, like me and (probably) you, don't pander to Skinny Puppy's literary pretensions but are willing to let them run with their crunch groove. This is like the heaviest part of a hip hop dub mix densified but

Chocolette: Some good quality stealing and a lot of heavy breathing

freed of its stodgy tethargy. Which makes it righteous as a heavyweight floor pounder, but suspect as a Skinny Puppy record. Is complicity OK if it's in someone else's name? Or what is a remix?

Lachandra: "Shy Girl" (Jump Street)

Telling signs, the A-side is the dub version; the first line is "Come here, boy"; and the last line is, "Don't do that, my parents will kill me." The title is ironic. 19-year-old Lachandra is shy like Sylvester Stallone. Disco never having represented the cutting edge of gender politics, this song is about Lachandra's act of choosing from conventional sexual roles. More than that, though, it's about the interplay between rolling bass and hand drums, and producers Bob and Lola Blank, makers of Lola's stellar "Wax the Van," make that interplay both comfortable and new. If the lyrics are generically repressive, the indie cultism of the beat isn't.

Peter Laughner: "Cinderella Backstreet" b/w "White Light/White Heat" (Forced Exposure)

Between the sage acoustics, the Velvets cover, and the way posthumous release, these romantic recordings by the late Peter Laughner, a founding member of Pere Ubu, come swathed in even more sentimental romanticism than could ever have been intended. Which isn't necessarily good for the tracks. Like when Laughner sings, "I tried to teach naïveté," he appears not as one who fared in a quixotic cause, but one who left this world because it wasn't up to scratch. Ten years after Laughner's death, this record documents loss rather than promise, and Laughner's criticisms become reflexive, as if in posterity his words lost the power to denigrate anything but his romantic, fatal alienation. Does it testify less to his talents than to the power of sentimentality that the unaccompanied "Cinderella" and the band version of "White Light/White Heat" put over such piercing conviction today?

Chocolette: "Tell Me (That You Like It)" (Sleeping Bag)

In smarter circles they call it appropriation, but by me it's good quality stealing. Once Chocolette made a savvy, buoyant disco record called "It's the East Street Beat" with producer Jhon Fair. Then Fair pilaged the production to make Dhar Braxton's "Jump Back (Set Me Free)," and had a bigger hit the second time around. Now he's raided "Jump Back" to make "Tell Me," and if the latest incarnation lacks Braxton's pop hook, it at least has an extra whammy of familiarity and a lot of heavy breathing. Folks that bemoan the absence of originality miss the point. Which doesn't necessarily make them wrong.

UNDERGROUND



Monica Dee

And in the master's chambers,
The post-punks gather for the feast;
they stab it with their steely knives,
But they just can't kill the beast.

Column by
Byron Coley

First things first. Just as 1986 was the Year of the 'Steen, 1987 is gonna be the Year of **GG Allin**. This fact's probably obvious to a hepster like yourself, but if it's not I suggest that you downshift yr butt toot sweet and head for a diskery. There isn't a wealth of vinyl by New Hampshire's legendary dirt-machine available these days, but a few new and retrospective style releases are, and they're making GG best friends with a whole new generation. Why is this? Simple, rock 'n' roll's true lowest common denoms are sex, drugs, filth, and destruction, and each and every one of these elements has been mastered by GG.

The retrospective portion of the "GG in '87" package is a cassette called *Hated in the Nation* (ROIR, 611 Broadway, Suite 725, New York, NY 10012), which was assembled from our man's large back catalog, with some additional live material thrown in. It ignores GG's first three records, which featured material ranging from the Dead Boys-esque "Bored to Death" to the flimsy attempted se.lout of "1980's R&R." The tape begins with the '81 single "Gimme Some Head," which was recorded in the company of Dennis Thompson and Wayne Kramer (both veterans of MC5). GG's forthright cussing brought out the best in those two coots, whose post-5 recordings prior to this session

had been strictly from Dullsville. GG was able to summon similarly powerful hate vibes from his own unnamed band, who quit en masse when GG's stage antics began to go beyond the "mere" Iggyoid blood & gutsism that had gotten him banned at virtually every club in New England. These weakos were promptly replaced by a well-mannered outfit called the Scumfucs.

It was with the Scumfucs that GG's vision finally achieved its, uh, fully mature state. The first product of this serendipitous union was '84's fabulous "Drink, Fight & Fuck" EP (which is well-represented on *Hated*). Recorded in what might as well be an outhouse, produced by the late Dick Urine, it is the first of GG's works where he doesn't build up to the dirt, but actually starts with the dirt as a given and goes on from there. Way effin' cool. And '84 was also the year that marked the big transmogrification of GG's live show. According to one of Mr. Allin's sidemen, "It was about that time that GG decided to stop just doing stuff like breaking bottles on people's heads. He started trying to actually rape women in the audience."

Beyond artifice lies a hell. Beyond this hell lies GG.

Meanwhile in New York, one of the world's finest and most obscure bands has finally coughed up their first LP. It's the soundtrack to an as-yet-

unseen video/movie called *Mondo Manhattan* (Lost-Twin/Tone) and the combo in question is **Chain Gang**. Don't feel bad if you've never heard of 'em. After recording four wild, impossible-to-find singles between 1977 and 1979, Chain Gang laid lower than low. They've performed less than once a year and have eschewed the notion of releasing more records in favor of continuing work on their video. Thank Christ there was a soundtrack. The a/b includes a spatter of new songs in El Chain's excruciatingly pan-generic style, bridged by dialogue excerpted from the vid itself. High points include an old fave cal ed "Pictures of Dead Presidents" that sounds like something Can might have recorded if they'd been chained up in a Lower East Side basement and weaned on garbage, the epic "Kill the Bouncers at the Ritz" (a beautiful sentiment in this or any season); and an amazing live spazz through a no-waveoid punk tune called "I Read," recorded live in '82. Along with their labelmates, Mofungo and The Scene Is Now, Chain Gang are among the very few bands producing painfully original and rawly intelligent ouch, so don't be a simp. Compende?

The obligatory New Zealand offering this month is the eponymous debut LP by **Headless Chickens** (Flying Nun, Box 3000, Christchurch, NZ). The

Chickens are a trio who can sound as sonically jumbled as this label's other great oddball outfit, The Tall Dwarfs. Coming off like a hacked-up member of the "Canterbury School" (imagine Faust trying to play the songs of Hatfield and the North) at one moment, Les Chicks're equally likely to sound like the Butthole Surfers, Swell Maps, or Warm Jets-era Eno at the next. When these tendencies surface simultaneously, things get especially briny.

In the case of Americans damaging their own rootage, there are precious few bands (apart from Tav Falco's indomitable Panther Burns, natch) who truly know how to rip it up. One of the few who do are Ohio's **Gibson Bros.**, who've finally released some vinyl on their own Okra label (1992B N. High St., Columbus, OH 43201). Doing two originals and a cover of Bukka White's "Parchman Farm," this coed quartet displays a kind of drunken respect for country blues with one hand while making supplicant gestures to the god of scuzz with the other. This is a great thing to do. For additional evidence of their swankness, hear their *Build a Raft* cassette (Old Age c/o Okra), on which they combine Charlie Patton's "Mississippi Bo Weevil" with a beatnik poem from *Highschool Confidential*.

It's been said that furs become a



Sue Schaffner

Far left, GG Allin looking for love in all the wrong places. Left: Chain Gang (L-R) Larry Gee, Phil von Rome, Rick Luanda, and Ted Twist. Below: Richard Grossman

legend most, but who the heck really believes that? Not me, brother. And not you either. We seek figures of mythic proportions. Men and women who are not afraid to stand on stage clad only in boxer shorts, blowing a bugle for all they're worth. Just such a figure as N. Carl Odam, perhaps better known as the **Legendary Stardust Cowboy**. The Leg has his first new record out since '84's *Rock-It to Stardom* LP and it is as hot as cork. "Standing in a Trashcan"/"My Underwear Froze to the Clothesline" (Spider Records, P.O. Box 20927, San Jose, CA 95160) collects two of the Leg's most popular live howlers and, fleshed out by a new backing group, the single will peel yr top right off. Hunching, hooting, hoitering, and teetering constantly on the brink of complete chaos, the Leg bellows like a truly American Brahmin.

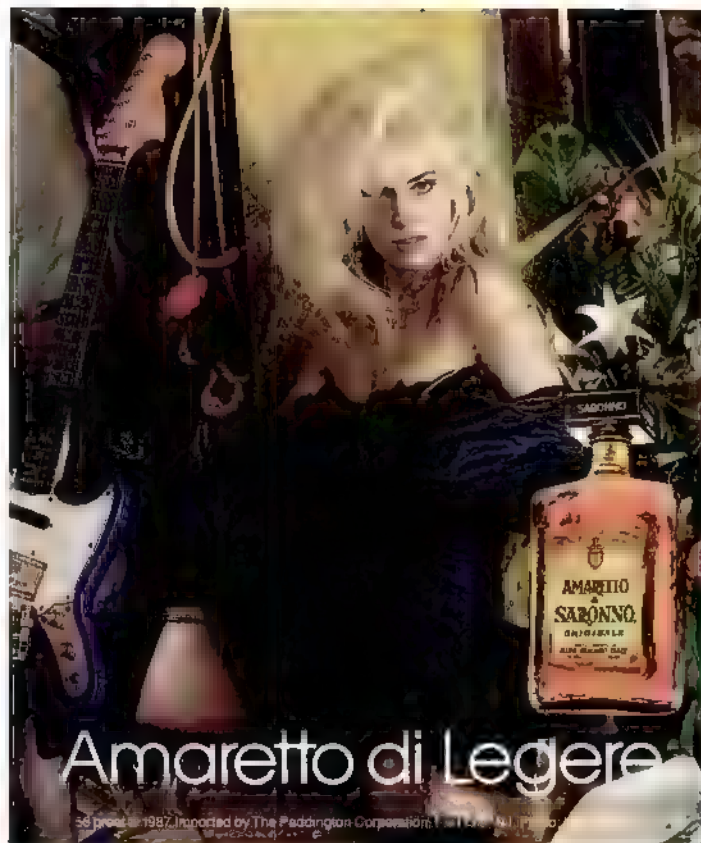
It's a truism that the Minneapolis/St Paul musical vortex is capable of producing real hep bands (the Suicide Commandos, NNB, the Hypstz, etc.), but to those who know (meaning

those who really know), emanations from the Twin Cities have sounded pretty bland lately. The big exception to this has been **Halo of Flies**. They've put out four singles, each of which is jammed to the tits with wahwah guitar, stomp-pumping rhythm drive, and vocals that are rich in slush and mud. Released on Amphetamine Reptile Records (4932 33rd Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55417), Halo's latest offering pairs "Richie's Dog" (a paean to psychedelic bondage) with a cover of the Creation's classic pill-pop opus, "How Does It Feel to Feel." The record and band are both solidier than a cement condom (as any band named after Alice Cooper's fourth-finest moment must be) And you, of all people, should appreciate that.

Although I'm sometimes hard-pressed to admit it, there is life beyond Scum Gulch. I don't really like to yell about it too much 'cause people get the wrong idea. I mean, most folks' concept of good pop has more to do with lame prissiness than anything else, so I try to leave describing the



Ann Summa



sweet stuff to others. Occasionally, however, some chucklehead burrows into a hip aesthetic trench and it's just such a trench that contains **Calvin Johnson's K Cassette Krue** label (PO Box 7154, Olympia, WA 98507). As the head of this mostly cassette label and also the amazing Beat Happening, Calvin has been responsible for making huge piles of sweet sound available to the masses. Witness the new series of singles K has released to represent "The International Pop Underground." First is Beat Happening's "Look Around," a loving mesh of deep vocalism and guitar jangle. Second is Girl Trouble's "She No Rattle My Cage," a loud yard-pounder of folk flanged irresponsibly designed to make you yearn for a stint in women's prison. Third is The Few's "Rollin' Like the Tide," which haunts the back of my rumpus room like a Kingston Trio album that spontaneously combusted from the goddamn purity of it all. Life w/these discs is somehow better than life w/o 'em. Scum Gulch or no.

In his liner notes to one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . [9 Winds, P.O. Box 10082, Beverly Hills, CA 90213], the new LP by L.A. pianist **Richard Grossman**, Richard Meltzer gripes heartily about the lack of people embracing the freedom implied by the stylistic breakthroughs of gents like

Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor. He goes on to put this "prevalence of prebreakthrough traditionalism" in the context of society's collective ass-tightening. As guys like the World Saxophone Quartet and Anthony Braxton start doing sets of Ellington covers (gestures as seemingly symptomatic of widespread conservatism as any I can imagine), it appears that there are fewer and fewer people who can live in a place that's beyond the land of the riff. Are you on the bus or what? Grossman is, and his playing here (both solo and in combo with other L.A. freemen) explores a whole world of note clusters that only existed for the moment he was striking 'em. The work here is not as frantic or dense as much recent group improv seems to have been, and Grossman has a way of extending lyrical lines straight into the hot ether without having them collapse. Which means that you don't even have to be a noise-hog to shovel this stuff all over yourself. You can play a record like this a hundred times before you realize you've heard it before. So besides its sonic hepness, this baby's cost-effective. What more could you want?

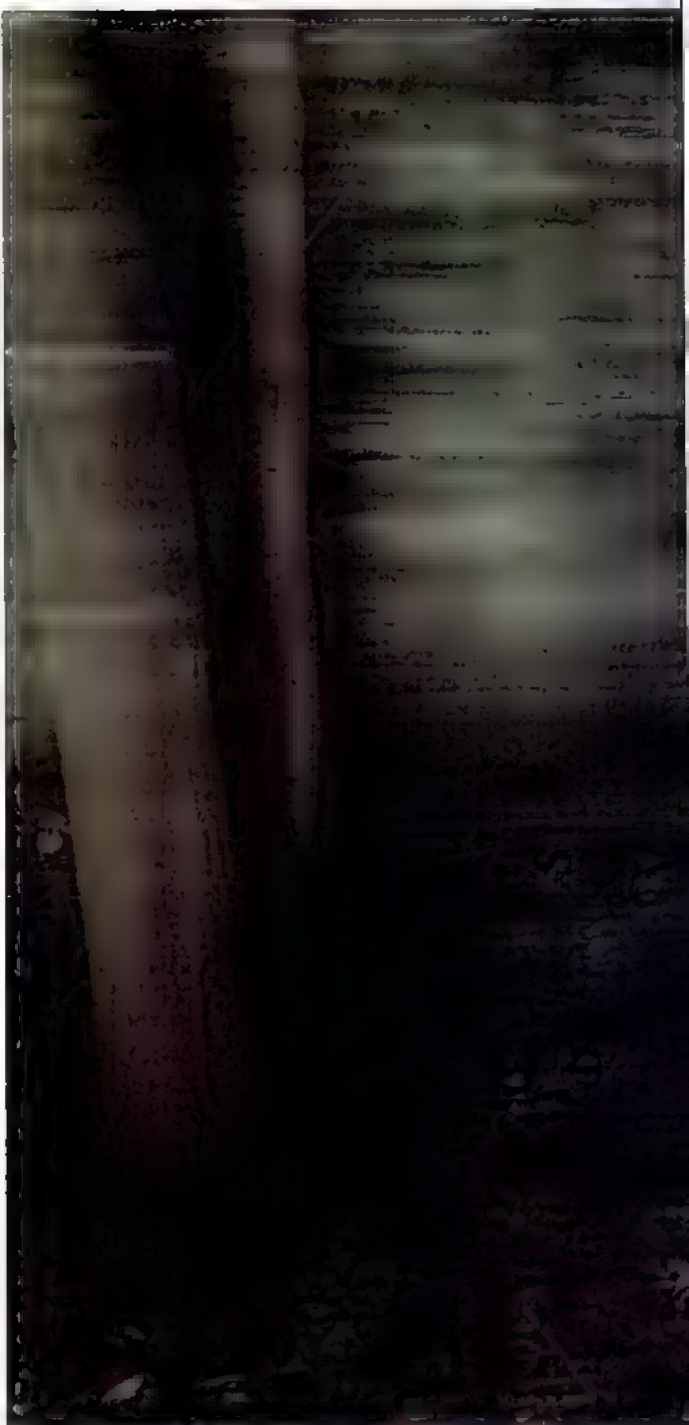
Should you have anything truly boss, I'd be happy to give it the once over. I can be reached c/o Forced Exposure, P.O. Box 1611, Waltham, MA 02264.

LOCAL HEROES

Simple Minds intend to conquer the world. Compared with Glasgow, the world is a pushover.

Article by James Truman

Photography by Laura Levine



In February 1986, midway through a world tour that would last nearly 18 months, Simple Minds returned to Glasgow, their hometown, to play three nights at a local concert hall. In the tradition of triumphant homecomings, a tradition that Simple Minds had long since turned into a ritual, fans absented themselves from work, from school, from pubs, from jail, and took to the streets. Two days before tickets went on sale, a couple hundred had set up camp beside the box office. Twenty-four hours later, there were a couple thousand, equipped with sleeping bags and cooking stoves and ghetto blasters,



Annex Corbin

partying through a subarctic Glasgow night. After seeing this spectacle on the TV evening news, Jim Kerr decided to go take a look.

"Hey Jim!" called out the first fan to recognize him. "I bought your last album."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. It's a real pile of crap, mate."

"Well, you didn't have to buy it."

"I already did. Just try and make the next one better, okay?"

"Right, okay."

"Hey Jim!" called out a second fan. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Came down to say hello."

"Prss off! If I was married to Chrissie Hynde I know where I'd be."

"You're out of your mind, pal."

"And that's the way it went," recalls Jimmy Devlin, Simple Minds' assistant manager. "Jim ended up staying four or five hours. He loved it. That's what Simple Minds are all about."

Four months later, the band returned to Glasgow, this time to give a

"The temptation is always to construct this ego for yourself, because it gives you something to talk about, it makes you more interesting."

recital at a soccer stadium. And on this occasion, it wasn't so much the band or its fans that caused trouble as the stadium itself. Ibrox Park is home turf for the Glasgow Rangers, one of the city's two fiercely competitive soccer teams, which together symbolize the city's even fiercer religious rivalries. In more than 100 years the Rangers, a Protestant team, had not fielded a Catholic player, flown a Catholic flag, or hired a Catholic bathroom attendant. And so when Simple Minds, an all-Catholic rock group, took over the stadium and built a stage set topped by an Irish flag, one half of Glasgow rejoiced, the other half seethed, and the team's directors threatened to call off the show. Only they couldn't, because in a ritual that was fast becoming tiresome, fans had already scooped up all 80,000 tickets.

To celebrate this victory, Simple Minds invited a thousand or so of their closest friends and relatives, gave them a special enclosure, and set up an open bar. And being not merely Catholic but also Scottish, their guests duly drank themselves into a stupor before the support acts were finished. By the time Simple Minds came on, the weight of the occasion had begun to take its toll. One of Kerr's uncles, convinced he was in the Devil's own ballpark, was out in the crowd murmuring benedictions and sprinkling holy water from a vial in his pocket. Others were hacking up the turf in the Rangers' home-goal area and planting some of the hundreds of rosary beads that groundsman would spend the entire next day removing.

And as this strange current sparked across the stadium, Jim Kerr formed the crowd into a mammoth choir, which was nothing new for Ibrox Park, except that on this night both ends of the arena were singing the same song.

Bruce Findlay, Simple Minds' manager, was watching the show from the wings. "It was fantastic," he recalls. "Just magical. It's what Simple Minds are all about."

At least one thing Simple Minds are about is Scotland, they are about Scotland in the same way that U2 are about Ireland. More than just an address, and more than mere sentimental attachment, nationality begins to explain the bands' shared Celtic-mystic inspiration (which can look like pretension), their disengagement from the London music industry (which might look like willful provincialism), and their crusading sense of mission (which borders on self-righteousness).

Physically joined to England, and 20 miles across the sea from Ireland, Scotland is governed by the former and spiritually bonded to the latter. And nowhere is the bond more evident than in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city and industrial center. Though similarly divided between Catholics and Protestants, Glasgow somehow escaped the sectarian war that exploded through Belfast in the early '70s. Most of its skirmishes were confined to those Saturday afternoons when both soccer teams were playing at home. One of the more popular battlegrounds was the Gorbals, a Victorian slum famous for its drunkenness, razor-wielding street gangs, and fierce neighborhood pride.

Jim Kerr was born in the Gorbals in July 1959, the

first child of a construction worker and a shop assistant. His father was a lapsed Catholic who dabbled in communism; his mother a devout Catholic who tried to keep her husband's dabbling from the neighbors. God knows what the neighbors were up to. With its religious differences and socialist politics and dreams of emigration to America, the Gorbals was a place of curious alliances: pictures of the Pope, Lenin, and J.F.K. hung side by side in any number of homes. "It was communism through alcohol," says Kerr. "The drunker people got, the more hard-line they became. For sitting around drinking, communism is the perfect political theory. It's always easier to say, 'Brothers, we're all together,' than, 'Fuck you, pal, it's your round.'"

This sense of brotherhood didn't prevent the nightly street fights, but it usually meant they were forgotten with the next day's hangover. "There were some knives and razors, but never guns. It was usually just people hitting each other with bottles and clubs. The important thing was not to get involved. A common sight would be a man and a woman fighting in the street, drunk, and the guy would be giving her a real seeing to, but when anybody intervened they'd both turn round and tell him to mind his own fucking business. It was all about going out to have a drink and a fight and then becoming mates again."

"There was this great feeling of community. Like if someone was too ill to work, a hat would be passed round in the pub for him. Everyone looked after everyone else. If you worked in a carpet factory, then you'd make sure all your friends and neighbors had nice carpets. If you worked in a TV warehouse, then you stole color TVs for everyone. It was amazing. Vans were coming and going at all times of the night. And there were all these incredible characters," adds Kerr, who tends to talk in italics. "Like if you wanted a pedigree dog, you'd go to Brown the Dog Stealer. It was all he did, steal dogs. You'd tell him what breed and color you wanted and he'd go scout around the richer neighborhoods until he found one. Then there was Dynamite Sloane, who was known as the best safecracker in Scotland. He has a terrible limp to this day because on his last job he blew up a safe and the door landed on his leg. It put him out of business. So he took to getting up in the local pubs to sing this terrible version of 'My Way.' He'd get the biggest abuse ever. So he used to turn round—this was part of his act—drop his trousers, and show the audience the two eyes he'd had tattooed on his ass. There were dozens of them. They were immortal, just . . . legends."

Nevertheless, the Glaswegian dream, like the Irish dream, was to get the hell out. Jim's grandfather had emigrated to the States in the '20s, made a fortune during Prohibition, lost it all on Wall Street, and returned to Glasgow, determined never to trust a bank again. Another relative had joined the army and wrote Jim colorful letters about life in faraway lands. "Unfortunately, they were usually written from jail. He was this total alcoholic who was always fighting and getting locked up. He'd tell me how brilliant it was being served Christmas dinner in jail in Burma, or

wherever he was.

"My own dad always dreamed of moving to Australia, but he never did. Everyone wanted to escape from Glasgow, but at the same time no one could accept that being creative was a way out. They almost wanted to accept the fact that they weren't talented. Everything was measured by muscle: How many bricks can you carry? Can you weld this? Can you rivet that? It's a terrible thing to break through. I was





Anton Corbijn

writing down words and ideas from the age of eight, but I never dared show them to anybody. They'd just have thought I was queer."

In the late '60s, when the city council began to tear down the Gorbals, the Kerrs moved to a new high-rise housing development nearby. Though later denounced as a miserable failure of social planning, it seemed at the time like a step toward heaven. Or at least New York. Up on the eleventh floor, Kerr cele-

brated by throwing his books and records out the window, watching them fly. And as he grew older and faced the difficult moments after pub closing when both he and his father had urgent need of the bathroom, he celebrated by opening the window and throwing up all over the gangs of toughs who used to congregate around the building.

By this time he had become friends with Charlie Burchill, a similarly introverted dreamer who lived a

couple floors down. Together they began venturing past the neighborhood pubs and chip shops to a local theater, whose campy, avant-garde productions brought it a well-earned reputation as a temple of decadence. Jim remembers being especially impressed by Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, in which Cleopatra was played by a man in drag and Anthony sang a version of "Walk on the Wild Side" midway through the third act.

And then came the music: first Marc Bolan, then Bowie and Roxy Music. All three were absolutely huge in Glasgow, as they were in most of Britain's largely industrial, traditionally macho, Northern cities. The contradiction can either tell you something about machismo or explain the unexpected ways in which Bolan, Bowie, and Roxy Music dramatized their audiences' dreams.

In their last year of school, Jim and Charlie formed a band. They didn't tell their classmates, who would have thought them queer, but an older group of boys who also had a band found out anyway and suggested they combine into a supergroup. Which they did, under the name Johnny and the Self-Abusers.

"The problem was no one had the balls to sing. I finally tried one night, but I was so embarrassed, I had to take the microphone on a long lead into the wash-room next door. It was quite as pathetic as that."

In March 1977, Johnny and the Self-Abusers made their first appearance in a Glasgow pub. They wore plastic raincoats and nail polish (Charlie Burchill also

wore a pair of shoes he'd made from an erector set), and they cranked out some Velvet Underground-inspired drones through their stolen equipment at sufficient volume to get a return booking the following week. And they kept coming back until the night their fans smashed up the pub and the band decided they hated each other anyway and broke up.

Meanwhile Jim was working day jobs, hoping no one would notice the traces of nail polish on his fingers, and Charlie was working as a plumber and building his own guitars and a violin. Punk rock was ripping up London at the time, and one day Jim and Charlie decided to hitchhike down to see the Sex Pistols. They ended up going to Italy instead.

And that was the closest they ever came to becoming the Clash. Like many bands from that period, Simple Minds didn't receive punk rock as a musical inspiration so much as a license to be publicly incompetent. When the band formed in 1979, with Mick McNeil on keyboards, Derek Forbes on bass, and the first in a series of drummers, they were genuinely incompetent, and even more genuinely deriv-

ative. Kerr's voice was a warble in search of Bryan Ferry's vibrato; the keyboard lines came off like bad Ultravox; and the rhythm section sounded like a Kraftwerk imitation with no ear for irony.

The band stayed pretty much that way for the next three years. Disdained by most London critics, they heeded the advice of their mentor-turned-manager Bruce Findlay and undertook successive tours of Europe to polish their act, and maybe grow up a little. "I never know what to say about those years," says Kerr. "It's hard to tell fans who liked us back then that it was really all garbage, so I don't. But it definitely was the case."

Jim Kerr met Chrissie Hynde in 1984 when their tour schedules collided in Australia. She was in the bruising final round of her relationship with Ray Davies, and Jim had never allocated much time for romance. So when they found themselves sharing the same hotel elevator, she opened the conversation:

"Aren't you that guy . . . er, what's your name?"

"Jim Kerr."

"Right, you're the singer in that New Romantic band I've seen you in a teeny magazine."

"Aren't you Chrissie Hynde?"

"Yeah."

"Funny, I remember the days when you were a good songwriter."

Six months later, they were married, and a year after that they had a daughter. Friends describe the marriage as volatile. Jim describes it as volatile by telephone. When neither is on tour, they live together in London. When left alone, Jim lives in a modest riverside apartment in Edinburgh. Next door is the inn where Robert Louis Stevenson once lived, and across the street, socking you in the eye, is the Firth Bridge, a gargantuan erector set construction traversing the Firth of Forth estuary. Jim regards it with the kind of enthusiasm that Charlie Burchill must once have felt toward his shoes. It has something to do with scale.

Jim Kerr is fascinated with size—the size of music, of cinema, of emotion. *Live in the City of Light*, Simple Minds' new live double LP, is a monument to his obsession. It's the band's biggest, because it sacrifices studio detail to arena-scale dynamics, it may also be their best.

The songs come mainly from the three albums released since 1982, the year *New Gold Dream* came out, and the year Simple Minds stopped being derivative garbage. What they became instead is tricky to define. Formally, it has little to do with originality. At their best, they're an interesting coalition of influences: the Celtic fire of Van Morrison, the gestural sweep of mid-period Bowie, the grandstanding of early '70s progressive rock. What's more interesting is the power they've been able to invest their material with, the scale of their ambition, the way their music seems to telegraph the usual rock 'n' roll egomania while simultaneously denying it.

"I think I learned something the night I saw Joe Jackson get hit over the head with a sandwich," says Kerr. "He was down on his knees at the front of the stage, singing away, having his emotional experience, and this guy comes up and whacks him over the head with this fucking sandwich. What can you do after that? Nothing!"

"Sometimes when I'm on stage I'll be standing there and just feel like this great big Scotsman, this guy who's probably going to get hit by someone's lunch. It's the same thing as coming back to Scotland after being on tour, just being reminded of who I am. That third person in the room . . . it's a killer, but you have to have it."

"The temptation is always to construct this ego for yourself, because it gives you something to talk about, it makes you more interesting. Like Sting in his last interviews, talking about the twisted side of his personality. The two faces of Sting! Give me a break! Why can't it be as simple as the fact that you play good, you've got good ideas, you're a good com-




Peter Anderson

"It's hard to tell fans who liked us back then that it was really all garbage."

modity?

"And the damndest thing is, it can't. There has to be something more than that, the desire, the magic that makes it work on a big scale. Peter Gabriel has it, U2 have it, and I think Simple Minds have it. All of us are trying to do something that appears new, but in fact it's an old, old thing whose thread has been lost.

"When I first got to know Bono, U2 had already started playing the big American venues. We hadn't been able to get our records out there, but we'd broken through all over Europe. The whole thing then was anti-stadiums, anti-rock. But we could both see this door ahead of us. There was a lot of talk between us and between our managers about how to approach it. We were afraid of it becoming like the '70s again, these dinosaur rock bands losing all contact with their fans, with reality.

"At the same time we both wanted to make this big music, we felt we were on some kind of crusade. With U2 it goes back to their belief in God. Our music has some of that euphoria, I think, but it's never been attached to any particular creed. It doesn't have a very articulate message, and I don't even really know where it comes from. I just know we make a much bigger noise than we should, and it's got nothing to do with volume. There's this potency, this light, to it. Now we've harnessed it, we're not about to let go. Maybe one day it'll even have a sense of humor." 



Anton Corbijn

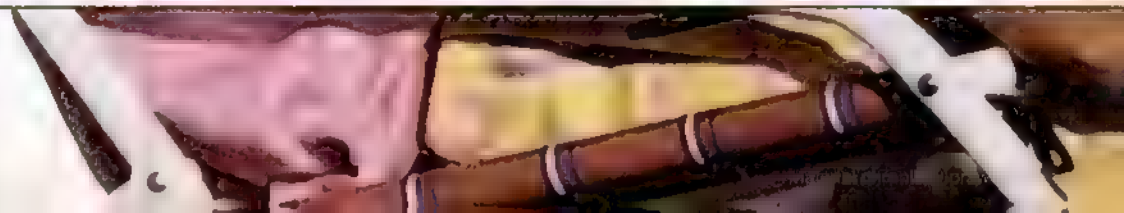


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POLITICS OF DANCING

In Russia, a curious rite of spring seems to be taking place. The rules are being relaxed, expression is being encouraged, and fresh ideas are beginning to form. It's an intriguing time to be young and Soviet.

Article by Mickey Remann

"Glasnost makes things transparent."

—UPI correspondent, Moscow

In Riga, capital of the Soviet Latvian Republic and center of the newly burgeoning Russian youth culture, Arturs Rinkis, experimental multi-media film maker, sits at his avant-garde coffee table with Riga Designer Studio director Valdis Clems and a Western journalist.

"Gorbachev at the top is a good thing. We at the base have been ready for a long time, but the stolid middle layer of bureaucracy that presses down on us every day lies like a thick plug stopping anything. Physically nothing has altered since Gorbachev," he says, "but the gravitational field is different. He seems to be supporting people who are searching."

Clems's project, yet to be fulfilled, involves a "House of Culture" to be built across Riga Bay. Avant-garde exhibitions, theaters, and a

Rock band at Plekhanov Institute during November 7 celebrations in Moscow.

cafe would flourish beneath a giant video screen visible from downtown Riga. So far, there have only been open-air light and water installations. "But in winter, everything is frozen," Clems says, "and the antifreeze stank so bad everyone walked around with their hands over their noses."

Global political issues momentarily aside, we in the West seem agreed: The ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev has meant at least a change in Soviet style. The signs of this are an easing of domestic censorship, a relative freedom of expression, a new openness—*Glasnost*, thy name is Gorbachev.

Initially, of course, the Western media was skeptical of *glasnost*'s very existence. Some said it was an overdue response to the domestic leanness of the Brezhnev years, a reaction to cries of despair from the consumer sector, the mere shifting of generations inside the Party structure. Or it was a propaganda device aimed at the soft sectors of Western opinion, a sop thrown to Western Europe's tactical-weapons anxieties. It was perhaps even a means of isolating the United States, and the most potent manifestation of Soviet protest against Star Wars.

Gradually in the Western press, disbelief changed to its opposite. From Ted Turner's Goodwill Games to "Donahue in Russia," from Germany to France to England, the story of the great thaw spread. In the U.S., we were treated to as much in *Time* and *Newsweek*, and read the same interviews with the same rock bands in *People* and *Rolling Stone*. In fact, you're reading about it now.

"... We play the best heavy metal between Riga and the shore. Our fans, the *metallisti*, are total hardness."

Seventeen-year-old Vasily from Moscow recently took an oral examination; his graduation depended upon the results. The subject was drug abuse among the young.

"How long has this problem existed?" his teacher asked him.

"For at least ten years." It was true, this answer, it was not, however, correct.

"Wrong. For one year." Drug problems were officially acknowledged for the first time a year ago. Vasily flunked.

In Leningrad's Institute for Labor Medicine, Tatiana has created her own niche. An habitu  by night of a drop-dead elegant literary cafe, by day she researches and applies herbal medicines to various metal allergies. "The new leadership has finally recognized the danger of chemical pollutants, the ecological damages. . . ." This is a far cry from the tale of the student who flunked a test by admitting the existence of a Soviet problem. Which of these is *glasnost*?

METALHEADS ON RUSSIA'S CULTURAL THAW:

"We're called Avgust and we play the best heavy

metal between Riga and the shore. Our fans, the *metallisti*, are total hardness. A community on which you can count. A heavy metal concert always sells out, three thousand people minimum. And since the militia no longer interferes with the concerts, who can stop us?"

In the new climate, the dream of success suddenly seems possible, plausible, practical. It is an intriguing time to be young and Russian. Imagine wondering if the way you felt had to do with your hormones or with Gorbachev's *glasnost*. Is this love, as Jimi Hendrix asked on an album that was once smuggled at great peril across the border, or is it just confusion? And if a young pioneer of the new Soviet spirit were to abandon his heavy metal band, or retire his radical hairstyle, would it be just a matter of growing older, or would it also be an act of cowardly capitulation? In dreams, even youthful ones, begin responsibilities.

A RUSSIAN DJ ON GLASNOST:

"My name is Igor, but everybody calls me East Bam. I got the name from the German star DJ West





Sergey Bortnikov

Bam: Of course. I can't hold a candle to him because, due to a lack of records, I can only scratch with tape recordings. Once a week I perform with my mobile *diskotjoka* in Riga. It can happen that someone does a breakdance. It's quite similar to our cossack dancing.'

RUSSIAN TRENDIES ON GLASNOST

'I'm Michael and that's Sergei. These are the kind of people you'd call yuppies. We call them New Wavers. Those who want to be on need good clothing and the right haircut. The clothing you can make yourself, but wet gel is extremely hard to get

A stone's throw away from the Kremlin, in the Rossiya Cinema's largest theater, the current Tsarist-era costume epic is playing to an empty house. Meanwhile, four different theaters are sharing a print of *Is It Difficult to Be Young?* In the Soviet Union, the thrill of receiving unfettered information is overwhelming, and the success of Yuri Podniek's documentary film is obvious. As soon as the first reel has been shown, it is shuttled into a waiting car and driven to the next theater and then to the next, and the next. Each has a long line of hopeful moviegoers.

After the last reel unwinds, and the lights come back on, the audience remains seated. Some cry, some

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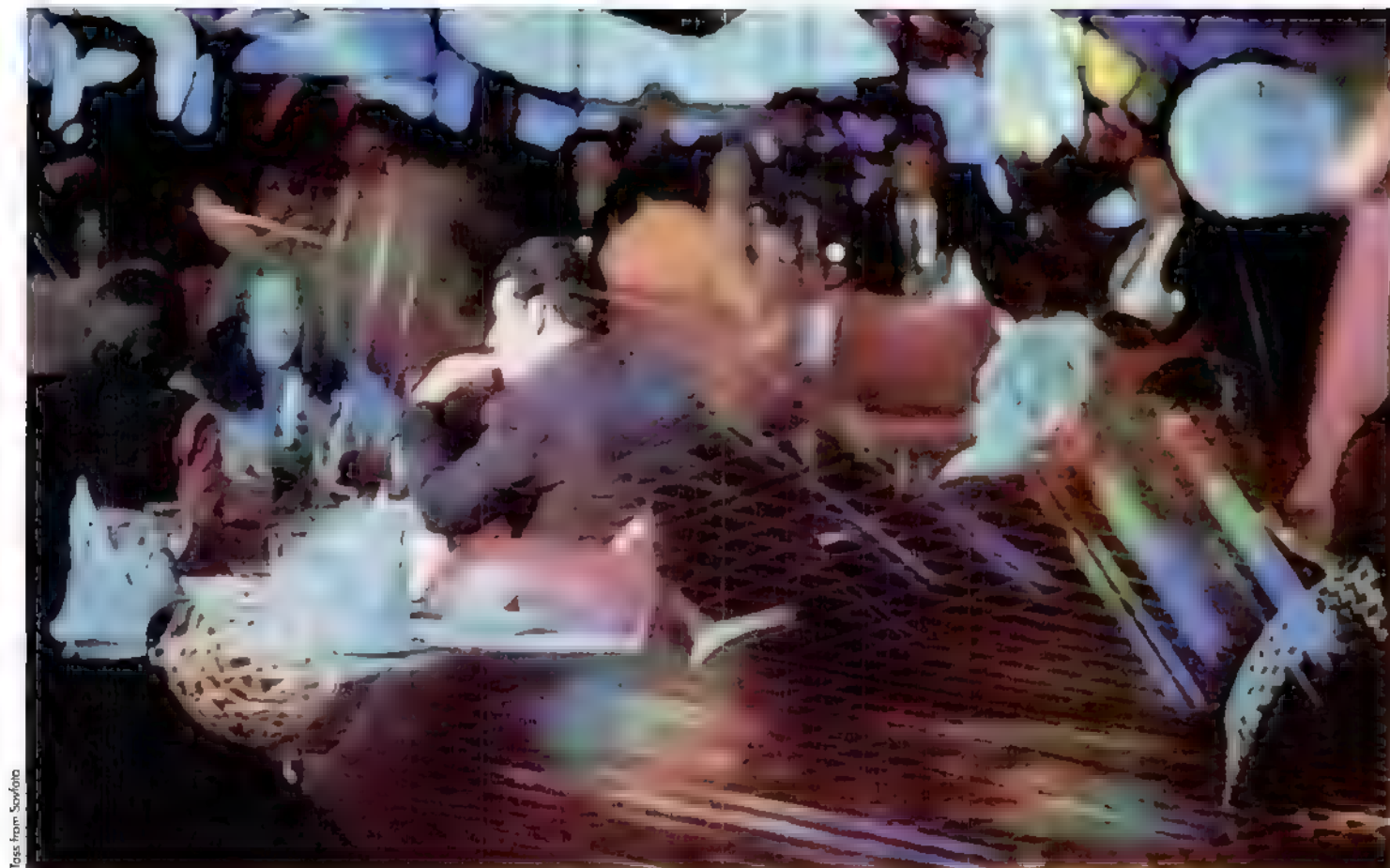
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Toss from Sovfoto

can't stop talking, some simply listen to the mass of voices speaking frankly in the bright light. Overnight, in the wake of a small film that simply observes what once would have been inadmissible, Soviet cinema has become the kind of social catalyst that the earliest Bolsheviks dreamed it would.

Director Yuri Podniek is proud of his picture. "A hit," he calls it. "Like your *Rocky Horror Picture Show*." And in the audience, a young man named Sergei shows off his ability to communicate in just the manner of an American: he lifts his heavy parka to reveal a T shirt. "You don't have to be crazy to live here . . ." it says. He turns around to show his back. "But it helps. . ."

SERGEI ON GLASNOST:

"We're not as enthusiastic about it as you people in the West. There was one in the Khrushchev days too. It was good for seeing who'd get up and yell 'Freedom!' After that, it was so much the easier to shut the culprits up."

"You can't vaccinate us against life," one of the film's punk protagonists declares earnestly. "We only want to use our energy. That's what we have in common." A pause. "And our fear. We have that in common too."

Another says, "I've joined the punks because it's good to throw things over. On our way back from the concert we unscrewed the lightbulbs in the subway. Then we all yelled 'Darkness! Darkness!'"

More scenes from the documentary.

A twenty-year-old veteran of the Afghani war describes the grotesque fairy tale of his re-entry into

civilian life. "Medals bring no comfort," he says quietly.

A devotee of Krishna works as a mailman by day, then chants, alone, at night.

A young mother in Kiev, seventy miles from Chernobyl, tells of an unlikely dream: She sees her child running barefoot through uncontaminated puddles.

Yet another punk, found guilty of hooliganism in the subway, is sentenced to prison and labor camp.

Later, in an apartment, we are meeting with some other people who appeared in Yuri Podniek's movie. Eighteen-year-old Igor Wassiljew has made a film of his own, with a busload of friends and the support of an amateur studio. In Igor's film, a few people survive a nuclear war and finally manage to have some fun.

"What are you doing these days, Igor?"

"I'm not doing anything. I've finished school and made this film of mine, *Saga*."

"What do you think about *perestroika*, the renewal?"

"I don't pay attention to any of that."

Around the low coffee table there's a heated discussion. The matter in question is "the documentary versus the art film."

"For me, cinema is the strongest art form."

"Yes, but I'm always annoyed by the noise of the camera. These loud Russian motors. With a nice, quiet American video recorder, everything would be different. . ."

"You're deviating from the subject, Igor. . . ." In Russia, everything has a subject, a purpose, a socially redeeming motive—or at least it once did.

Normunds, editor of the new youth magazine *Awots*, tries to heat up the discussion. "You were the

Moscow restaurant, *Starry Sky*.

main characters in *Is It Difficult to Be Young*? Didn't you notice how Yuri Podniek tried to fit you into his concept? How he adeptly maneuvered you into situations where you had to reveal yourselves with the cameras rolling?"

"It wasn't Yuri who sent the soldiers to Afghanistan," says Igor.

"But the film isn't a chronicle, not at all. There's a lot it doesn't say!"

"That's idiotic. You think the film has to be everything? It isn't. Even so, it questions our society. The film is necessary!"

"Because it fits into the *perestroika*?"

"I'd like to pull all your pants down and offer you a few hard questions!" yells an art student in a black leather jacket. He's of the type known as "soul punks." "We can talk endlessly about truthfulness and all that. But it's all just theory!"

"How about making a movie that shows life ten years from now?"

"We're long past that," says the poetess Rudite softly. "Ten years ago I could never have imagined what's reality today."

In an interview, Podniek explains the motive for his movie: "What's important to me is a new understanding between the generations. People try to keep the young ones in isolation, not giving them a chance to make mistakes. But then how are they supposed to

Continued on page 76



Marianne Faithfull's life
in the fast lane surely made her
lose her mind.

AS TEARS GO BY

Article by Scott Cohen

Photography by George DuBose

Marianne Faithfull was the '60s symbol of hip. She was Mick Jagger's girlfriend. The Beatles were her friends. When swinging London was the center of the universe, she was the center of attention. At 17, she had a big hit single, "As Tears Go By." But as the years went by, she fell out of grace. By the '70s she was a drunk and a drug fiend, living on the streets, the symbol of everything unhip. What people don't remember is that beneath all the sex, glamour, and decadence was an extremely clear, direct, simple girl. Before she started living with Mick Jagger, before she drank too much or took drugs, she was a symbol of something good, and if that symbol hadn't been so authentic, the debauchery that followed wouldn't have been so extreme.

In 1979, after nearly 10 years of self-imposed exile, Marianne released *Broken English*, a disturbingly brutal album, emotionally and authentically extreme. It was one of

the greatest and least expected comebacks in pop history. But her next two albums (*Dangerous Acquaintances* and *A Child's Adventure*) failed. For the second time in her life Marianne appeared to be a one-hit wonder. Then she recorded a track for *Lost in the Stars*, producer Hal Willner's Kurt Weill tribute album, which led to her new LP, *Strange Weather*, a collection of melancholy songs perfectly suited to her voice. As a contemporary torch singer, Marianne has found the place she best belongs.

One day after Catholic school in 1964, when Marianne Faithfull was 17, she and John Dunbar, her husband-to-be, went to a party Andrew Loog Oldham was throwing for Adrian Poster. Andrew Loog Oldham was the Rolling Stones' manager and producer, and Adrian Poster, who was 16, had just made a record Oldham produced. The launching party turned out to be Marianne's discovery party, and the first time she saw Mick Jagger. He was having a big fight with his girlfriend,

Chrissie Shrimpton, the little sister of Jean Shrimpton, who was a big fashion model in the '60s. Chrissie should have known better than to burst into tears while wearing false eyelashes, because all '60s makeup fell apart the minute you laughed or cried. Oldham turned to John Dunbar and asked, "What's the name?"

"Marianne Faithfull."

"Can she sing?"

"I don't know, but she can try."

Andrew Loog Oldham was a lunatic. He was a Svengali. He was the whiz kid of his time. He worked for Brian Epstein as the Beatles' publicist and that's where he got the idea to produce the Stones, a band on the opposite side of the coin from the Beatles. He thought up sayings like "Would you want your daughter to marry a Rolling Stone?" He started the Satanic Majesty thing. And when he met Marianne, he thought she was the perfect foil for that. She looked like an angel.

"The most embarrassing question Andrew asked me that night was my telephone num-



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ber. I didn't grow up with a telephone, television, car, or anything like that. My father lived in a very beautiful home, but my parents got divorced when I was six and mother and me had a very difficult scene. Telegrams had to be sent to me on Norman Road saying, 'Be at Olympic Studios three o'clock on Wednesday,' and I had to send a telegram back saying 'Can't make it at three o'clock Wednesday. Have to make it after school.' Then Wednesday came and the session turned up."

The song she recorded first was "As Tears Go By." Mick and Keith wrote it, but did not play on it. They were in the booth with Oldham. The booth was high up in the studio, so they could look down on her. Jimmy Page may have been up there as well. She can't remember. They knocked the song out in half an hour and that was it.

"For protection, I brought a friend, Sally Oldfield, who was my best friend at school and whose brother was Michael Oldfield. After the session, the boys gave us a lift back to the station so we could get home. We were little and had to be home by nine. I remember Mick trying to make me sit on his lap and I made Sally sit there. I was used to John Dunbar. Mick was quite a different kettle of fish.

"I didn't talk to him that day. I never talked with him until the first night I went to bed with him. By then I was 19. When I talked to him, I found out he wasn't the slob I thought he was. But until I did talk to him, he was always doing stupid things to me. I remember at a *Ready, Steady, Go* party I was wearing one of my low-cut dresses, having clicked by now that it was a good idea, and Mick was very drunk. When Mick's drunk, Mick's awful. Mick can be very charming when he's not drunk. He was always trying to get my attention, I suppose, and the trick he pulled on this occasion was to tip a glass of champagne down my dress. I began to look down my nose very seriously at Mick Jagger. Mick's much more of a gentleman now. He wasn't very polished in those days, and I wasn't grown up enough to see any charm in him. I thought he was awful. I thought Keith was really smashing. Mick did not make a big hit with me at all."

When "As Tears Go By" was released, she went home and played it for her mother and forgot about it. Occasionally, she'd go off and do promotions with Oldham and the song crept up the charts for 13 weeks before making it to No. 2. When the autumn term came along, she had to decide whether to go back to school or out on the road with the Hollies and Freddie and the Dreamers. She decided to go on tour. She had 15 minutes to perform "As Tears Go By," "Green-sleeves," some Joan Baez song, and "Blowin' in the Wind." She had one guitarist. She was wedged in between all the Beat groups. That was the fashion. If she had played guitar, she would have become a folkie.

"The first TV show I did in England was *Juke Box Jury*. My family was the nouveau poor, we were very poor indeed, so I went to a school friend who had bread and I said, I need to borrow a frock. I was going on television and I didn't have anything to wear and she lent me a lovely dress. *Juke Box Jury* was a show where they played your record and they had a jury and this thing they called a 'hot seat' behind the screen, where the person whose record they were playing sat, but the jury didn't know that, and the cameraman took this amazing shot of me with my knees knocking. Rather nice legs, but quivering and shaking. I looked strange because I looked like an angel, an angel with really big tits. It was the first time I ever performed, if you can call that performing.

"The next television I did was *Ready, Steady, Go*. This time I bought a frock, a white dress, very low cut. Sandy Shaw was on the show and she was completely flat-chested, which made for a very good picture. I did look quite amazing, with my long blond hair. Also, I had been trained at school not to show feelings or to react. I was very cool and calm, which went well with that image of the song, "As Tears Go



By." But I had these enormous tits, which I didn't realize until the TV people did. I had to do an interview with one of the disc jockeys and all he did was look down my frock."

Marianne and John Dunbar were married when she was 18, and she gave birth to a son, Nicholas, at 18½. John was 20 or 21. The marriage lasted 18 months. He didn't turn her on to drugs, but he introduced her to everything else. He didn't want her to become a druggie, and that was one of the reasons their marriage broke up.

"One day, John, being a very arrogant but fascinating young man, said, 'Okay, I'm off. I'm going to Greece.' In the eight weeks he was away, 'As Tears Go By' became number three in Britain. By the time John got back, the whole situation had changed. I was no longer the little schoolgirl. We suddenly had to deal with the situation of me having a record on the charts, and not going to Cambridge and not being what I was going to be."

Marianne had met Brian Jones through John. In 1964, he and John Lennon had Indica, an avant-garde art gallery in London. "By the time I became aware of the Rolling Stones, Brian was with Anita Pallenberg. They were holding court in their apartment in Kensington. Brian was my friend. We did try sleeping together once, but it was ridiculous. It was a joke, like if you tried to fuck one of your best friends. It never works. You just crack up laughing; it wasn't a sexual relationship. Anyway, Brian was very bad to women. He beat them up. He was very violent. It was much better to be a friend of Brian's than his girlfriend. He liked me, respected me, and teased me viciously. Brian was also a brilliant musician. He could pick up any instrument and play it immediately, which was a staggering thing to watch."

Marianne went to Brian and Anita's every night. That's when she started to smoke grass and took her first LSD trip, in late '65. Keith was living there too, but not Mick. He wasn't really in that scene. He was the boy left out. They looked down on him. She saw Brian, Anita, Keith, and Linda Keith, who was Keith's girlfriend then. Brian was definitely the leader of this

group, although there were other people as fascinating.

"Brian and Keith were best friends. Brian and Keith were what Mick and Keith later became. Keith is definitely 'still waters run deep.' He played his cards close to the vest, unlike Brian, who was all over the place, who told everything to everybody, usually with some kind of chip on his shoulder. I suppose Brian was also a very tragic figure, but I didn't see that until the end, by which time Keith had switched to Mick and then went in combination against Brian. Brian was not as tough as Mick or Keith. They were indestructible. If two guys like that get together against somebody who's frail to begin with, with many, many terrible characteristics, flaws, and faults, he doesn't stand a chance."

Marianne met Ike and Tina Turner at Brian's, when they were on tour in England, and they told her to come down to Bristol and catch the show. So off she went in her Mustang with Pat, her roadie, driving because she doesn't drive. It was the first time she'd seen Ike and Tina. It was also the first time she saw Mick perform. He had learned to dance from watching Tina Turner. Marianne was backstage, watching Mick watch Tina. Then he went out on stage and did it himself. After the show, she went to the motel where the Stones were staying and smoked lots of joints, more joints than she had ever smoked in her life, which rendered her speechless, and watched *Repulsion*. Then they laid about for hours. Slowly people fell out and she was sitting alone in a room with Mick and one of the Ikettes. Marianne and the Ikette were playing a game: who was going to split first.

Marianne hadn't come all the way down to Bristol for nothing. She had an interesting time watching everybody drop out and she wanted to see what would happen, who she was going to end up with. She had been married and suddenly realized she was free. Then the Ikette flounced off in a huff, leaving just her and Mick. She got embarrassed and said, "Let's go for a walk," because she always found it easier to talk to people when she was walking. There was all this dew and her feet got wet. They talked about lowlife, Stonehenge, ancient Britain, and King Arthur. She was

**Suicidal urges
come out
like commands.
It's not like
any other urge,
like I'd
like a pizza.**

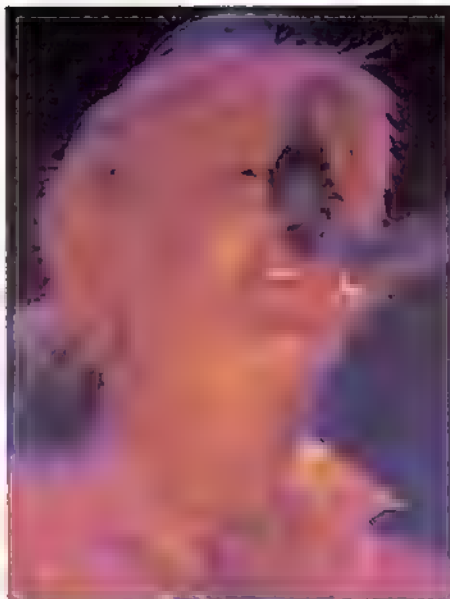
amazed he knew about those things. She never expected to communicate with him. Then, when they'd had their wack and the sun had come up and they'd discussed the Holy Grail, it seemed completely natural to get into bed

"It was the beginning of about a year of intense sexual relations. But it wasn't an event. Mick was very nice and cuddly. I would have been scared to death had he been a fantastic demonic lover. I had hoped slightly to find myself in bed with Keith Richards, but I didn't. I found myself in bed with Mick Jagger."

It wasn't until after Marianne had run off to Italy and returned to London that she finally found herself in bed with Keith

"My trip to Italy ended when my money ran out. I had to get back and think about what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I was at the point where I was sick of my image. I hated it. It looked like I was a cowgirl. When I got back to London I checked into the Mayflower Hotel. I didn't want to go back to my house. The minute I got into my hotel room, Keith, Brian, and Tara Brown rang me up. 'Come on over,' they said. They came over and brought me over to Brian's, where we took acid. That was the night I slept with Keith. It's possible that Keith was already at this point plotting to get Anita from Brian and we were like two ships in the night. But it was the same night I was with Keith that I found out I was marked for Mick. I didn't feel like I had much choice. In those days I just let things happen."

The most persistent and famous rumor about Marianne Faithfull is that the Rolling Stones ate a Mars bar out of her vagina the night of Mick's drug bust at Keith's house. Mick, Keith, Marianne, a bunch of friends, and a drug dealer who turned up in London with all this acid plotted to go down to West Wittering, where Keith had a house, and trip together. Brian, who was



Ken Bloom

still with Anita, didn't come. Their trip was planned around going to a house owned by a great surrealist art collector, but it was Sunday and the place with the Dalis and Magrittes was closed. They spent their LSD trip in a Land Rover, which wasn't very pleasant, in the rain. When they got back to Keith's, the first thing Marianne did was have a bath. It was a relief to get

back into the house where there was a fire and music. The record they played over and over was Bob Dylan's "Everybody Must Get Stoned." When she got out of the bath she realized she hadn't brought anything to change into. The only thing she could see herself wearing was a beautiful fur rug, which was in Mick's and her bedroom. So she put on the fur rug and, with nothing on underneath, came down to the drawing room, sat on the couch, watched the fire, and smoked a joint. Then about 25 cops busted in. She thought it was a joke.

"At about this time, 1967, the Rolling Stones were getting dangerous, or so the establishment thought, and had to be taken down a peg or two. The *News of the World* got hold of an interview with Brian in a nightclub. 'Yes, I take pills,' he said, as he knocked back four Dexedrines with his Remy Martin,' is how the article read. The article was all about sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. They caught Brian, but their editor said, 'No, we know all about Brian Jones. Change the name to Mick Jagger.' The article came out and Mick went crazy and slapped a writ on the *News of the World*. Silly boy. The *News of the World*, in turn, somehow got all our phones tapped, found out we were going down to West Wittering to take LSD, and decided to bust Mick Jagger properly, except they didn't get much, just enough to cause trouble."

"They only got four little uppers on Mick, which were mine. They also took a big piece of hash out of Mick's pocket, thought it was a piece of dirt, and put it back. All they could get Keith with was having his premises used. They didn't get the LSD. The drug dealer had a whole suitcase full, wrapped in silver foil, and he said they mustn't open any of these packets because they would expose the film inside. So they didn't search him, which always made me think he was in on it. As for me, I just sat there in my fur rug, with no Mars bar. It's a folk legend, and if people want

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to believe that when the cops walked in there was this incredible orgy going on, they will, but get it straight."

In July 1969, Marianne took 150 Tylenols in order to kill herself. Marianne always did things in extremes. Six days later she woke up in a hospital, and when she opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was her mother and Mick Jagger. Mick and Marianne had gone to Australia to make Ned Kelly. After a 35-hour flight, they had a nasty reception. About 100 Australian reporters were down on the tarmac freaking out because Mick Jagger had come to play Ned Kelly, their folk hero. In 1969, Australia was like Britain in the '50s. They were incredibly puritanical and this faggot coming to play their macho hero was the greatest insult. Marianne was pretty much gone by the time they landed. In those days she was frightened of flying. That was her excuse. She went to the doctor and said, "I got a long flight and I need some downers." On this occasion she said, "And I'll be away for three months." The doctor gave her a prescription to last three months. She must have taken 15 Tylenols by the time they landed. By the time they got to their hotel, she was in a trance. When they got to their room, Mick went straight to sleep. Marianne decided to take the rest of the pills.

What frightened her was that she was high up in a hotel room and couldn't open the windows. Had a window been open, she could have jumped. She saw things on the street that could not have been there. She saw Brian Jones, who had just died of an apparent overdose five days before. Then she went into a coma which lasted six days.

"The central vision of those six days, not that I knew it was six days, went on for a long time. I had gone onto the other side. There was no weather, no wind or rain or sunshine or darkness. There was nothing at all. The place looked like the illustrations in books by

The night I was with Keith I found out I was marked for Mick. I didn't feel I had much choice.

Edmond Du Lac and those Dürer engravings of hell. I was very interested in opiate literature at the time and this vision was definitely on an opiate scale. The grandeur and enormity of the place and the general feeling was like one of those engravings. But surroundings didn't interest me as much as walking along with Brian, who had woken up dead and didn't know where he was. Lots of people do that. We walked along and talked and talked. It was the nicest chat I ever had with him. We talked about everything you could imagine; how he had woken up not knowing where he was and put out his hand for his Valium or his drugs and there was nothing and how frightened he was. He was lonely and confused and brought me to the other side to walk with him on this particular bit of the journey, which I did with pleasure. Afterwards, he said he was really sorry to put me in this fix. I didn't mind. I understood how he felt. He didn't know if he was dead. I'm sure when people die quickly, they must go through terrible confusion. They don't know that they're dead. That's why there are ghosts. Ghosts are people who don't quite realize they're dead. Death is the next great adventure. That's what Brian and I talked about. Then, when we got to the end of the Du Lac or Dürer vision, the edge over which you went or not, Brian slipped off and I didn't. I heard

voices calling me back, but I still had some more adventures to go on on the way back."

Getting back took a long time. It was like jogging through a place that was very monochromatic, like a ghost town, where there were other people jogging or floating along. It was like an Alice in Wonderland dream, where the feet don't quite touch the ground. After several more dreams, she dreamt she was lost in an airport and people were coming up to her asking, "Where are you going? What are you doing here?" and she would say, "I'm waiting for Mick to come and get me," and he did. If he hadn't woken up and gotten her to the hospital so quickly, she would have died.

"I think my mother was by my bedside in the hospital all the time. I think Mick wasn't. He was drumming back and forth from his work. Nothing stops Mick when he's working, not even an attempted suicide. He's got to be ultraprofessional. I wouldn't expect different. If Mick tried to kill himself while I was working, I wouldn't stop either. So wouldn't my mother. That's how I was brought up."

Marianne felt very bad about her attempted suicide. It caused a tremendous amount of trouble. She always took her anger out on herself. People who commit suicide usually do it to punish somebody else for something. It's a weapon to make people feel bad. In her mind she was punishing Mick because Brian Jones had just died, and she was angry about the way he and Keith had treated him.

"Brian was a hopeless mess and they were just so cool. Brian really fucked himself up by letting himself get much, much, much too involved in drugs, even before Keith got like that. I always felt that Keith's way of reacting to Brian's death was to become Brian. But Keith is so strong, physically, that he didn't look like

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A wicked wind whips down the desolate length of 57th Street in Manhattan. It's Sunday afternoon, February 9, 1986, and on newsstands the front pages of a half-dozen newspapers proclaim Haiti's jubilation in the two days since Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier was forced to flee. Flanking those headlines are accounts of Ferdinand Marcos's faltering grip on the Philippines following his rigged election victory over Corason Aquino, and rumors from South Africa that its racist regime is considering releasing Nelson Mandela from his 20-year confinement, if he can be coerced into leaving his homeland.

"The last thing Reagan wanted was to have Haiti, the Philippines, and South Africa, three corrupt governments he supports, being exposed in the world press," says Little Steven as we sit down for lunch. "You'd have to look way back into history to find a society and a people as manipulated as our own. I expect something very big to happen in America within the next two years, because we have a whole society basing its beliefs on false premises."

It's the third winter of Little Steven's discontent, a state of mind first vented during 1983-84 on his second solo album, *Voice of America*. After 12 years with Bruce Springsteen and/or the E Street Band, and a quietly received first solo LP, 1982's *Men Without Women* (*Under the Gun*), Steve Van Zandt had decided that he wanted to strike out on his own. He dropped the "Miami" Steve moniker (a reference to his dread of cold weather) that he'd acquired in the pre-E Street era

of Bruce's Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom, back when Asbury Park was scarred by race riots. A lot of unresolved frustration had built up since those wild days of 1970, and the music on *Voice of America* hammered it home with a jagged vengeance.

But while the title track of *Born in the USA*, a Van Zandt coproduction, was ruling the airwaves with its glorious ambiguities, *Voice of America* smoldered on the shelf. The song titles—"Justice," "Solidarity," "Fear," "Los Desaparecidos," "Out of the Darkness," "Among the Believers," "I Am a Patriot"—announced some of the hungriest music in memory, rock ravenous for an audience, recognition, and resolution. But it was a repertoire that couldn't get him arrested, even when he took his message to the streets on a tour with his Disciples of Soul that ultimately segued into visits to South Africa and Nicaragua. That travel research ultimately went into the writing for his next solo record. But before that, it produced "Sun City."

"'Sun City' was originally written for my next album," he explains, "and it wound up taking a year out of my life. Me doing *Voice of America* didn't mean anything, because it was an individual effort by someone not enough in the public eye to be effective. It wasn't until 50 artists said apartheid's wrong on 'Sun City' that it got on the news. I could have made the record by myself, it would have sounded exactly the same—and at best been a footnote in rock 'n' roll. Unfortunate but true."

"What was most effective was making the so-called rock stars disappear, become normal looking, almost like any



Article by Tim White.
Photography by Loren Hayes.

NO RETREAT, NO SURRENDER

Little Steven has a soap box
and he's gonna use it.



body, especially on the video, because I wanted the political reality to get past radio programmers and 'Entertainment Tonight' and pour out. And, thank God, it did. And now," he sighs, "I've gotta get past radio, too!"

But his new record, *Freedom—No Compromise*, is far from commercially designed. It's steeped in political concepts and themes, most notably the enduring tragedy of Native Americans.

"What I hope to show are the parallels between black South Africans and American Indians, between the current relocations from reservations in Big Mountain, Arizona, and the relocations from the rebellious South African townships. In both cases, phony tribal councils and corrupt government agencies are making deals with mineral and mining companies that screw the people out of their homes, the territorial birthrights, their heritage."

One can only wonder what the private Little Steven gets out of his relentless one-man campaign for national accountability. "I have these moments of weakness where I question whether there is a place for me in this business," he muses as lunch ends. "It never becomes, should I start writing love songs again? Because that's impossible. I can't write about anything that isn't on my mind. That doesn't mean I won't ever write a love song again. When we all stop being afraid of each other and our difficult past as a people, there'll be time for everything."

Now it's the spring of 1987, and there's no time for anything. Little Steven is pacing around the office of Freddy DeMann Management on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, "coordinating a whole bunch of Hollywood showbiz shit." As always, he's dressed in revisionist gypsy style: jeans, beads, bracelets, and earrings twinkling beneath a head scarf that's pulled down to his brow. The faintly blemished skin is smoother in its olive sheen than photos indicate, the Roman nose more pronounced, the large mouth less grim, the eyes more hooded. It's a curiously handsome face, cagey in its awkward contours, proud in its essential melancholy.

Right now, he's impatient to finish shooting videos of "Trail of Broken Treaties" for the American market and "Bitter Fruit" for Europe. But details and conversations keep detaining him.

"You know," he frets, "interestingly enough, I've found a similar thing in South Africa, and with farmers in Nicaragua, that I found among the Indians of Arizona and South Dakota and upstate New York. There's a certain lack of bitterness and anger that I always find startling. Maybe it's my Western European blood, but I get so angry, and they simply do not."

"It took me a while to learn any speck of that peacefulness from them. I've gotten a measure of it in the last two years, as I've begun serious studies of the mystical and supernatural sides of American Indian philosophy. It's a certain kind of spirituality that's in all of us, but it's taken me quite a while to tap it



It's a kind of integrity that only history, and your secure links to it, can create."

The question this begs is the still-unanswered one concerning Little Steven's own history. Despite all that has been written about Springsteen, little is known about the people closest to Bruce—and especially about his best friend. It's a subject that makes Little Steven reticent, uncomfortable, and one approaches it cautiously, first asking him how he discovered rock.

"There were a few . . . yeah . . . I could think of three early records, probably, that deeply affected me. I'd gotten poison ivy as a kid, and my mother or my aunt bought me the Coasters' record "Poison Ivy" in 1959. Immediately, the Coasters became one of my favorites. The first record I remember buying, I guess it was with my allowance, was Little Anthony and the Imperials' "Tears on My Pillow" in 1958. But the first record that really killed me, that was a spiritual experience, an otherworldly thing that took me out of myself, was Curtiss Lee's "Pretty Little Angel Eyes" in 1961. Don't ask me why. It might even have been before girls were happening for me, but it just affected me, made me tingle."

"I got a guitar when we went up to Grandma Van Zandt's house in upstate New Jersey. In the attic was an old acoustic of my grandfather's—he was long gone—and it had strings two inches off the neck. I started learning on that, but then my mom's father started teaching me Italian folk songs from the village he was from. I was 11 or 12 at the time. They were simple two-

chord things. I can still recall how nice they were, beautiful little songs." He grins. "I'm 100 percent Italian with a Dutch name."

Why is that?

The grin disappears.

"Bill Van Zandt adopted me," he murmurs after an extended silence. "He's the only father I've ever known. The rest . . . I can't remember."

Little Steven was born on an overcast, 40-degree Wednesday in November 1950 in Winthrop, Massachusetts, a Suffolk County fishing town built in the 1600s beside an ancient Algonquian Indian trail. His mother had grown up in adjacent East Boston. His father was, and remains, little more than a phantom. "I don't know his first name," he says, then amends: "Out of respect for Bill Van Zandt and my mom, I don't want to say my original father's name. My mother dislikes his surviving relatives enough that she doesn't even want them to know about my professional life."

"My father was a strange case. He apparently was a difficult guy who hated to stay put. When my mother and he married in the late 1940s, he was a part-time clothes presser, but he quickly quit his job. I was roughly three years old when they divorced—which was heavy, because both of them were raised in Old World Catholicism, but there was supposedly so much ill will between the families, that they welcomed the severed ties. I couldn't even tell you what the man looked like, because my mother destroyed any photos of him."

"Bruce took a hideous turn at this time and got into surfing. He got a board, baggy trunks, the whole, awful bit!"

Post-war Boston was a bustling, sophisticated city in the period of Steven's early childhood.

"It was an exciting place, it seemed like a huge carnival" in the boy's eyes, but Steven and his mother had little access to its diversions and indulgences. Unable to survive without financial assistance, they were rescued by his mother's parents. Sam and Ida "Nanna" Lento lived in a two-family house in the Italian section of Watertown, Massachusetts, another working-class Boston suburb founded on land previously held by the Massachusetts Indian nation (in this case, the Pequotsette tribe). The Lento clan were themselves descended from uprooted outcasts from the poor Italian provinces of Calabria, a region then known as Mezzogiorno, "The Land That Time Forgot."

"It was a childhood with images straight out of *The Godfather*—my grandfather raising tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant in his tiny backyard garden, the grown-ups sitting around drinking homemade wine, the streets filled with pushcarts."

"My grandfather ran a shoe repair business and I was about five, the youngest boy in my first-grade class, when he started me working there, sweeping the scraps of leather soles off the floors as these greasy machines were roaring and spinning real fast all around me. The contraptions in that shoe shop—rather than the absence of my father—were my first sensations of vulnerability and danger."

Little Steven's next recollection is of climbing into his mother's white Ford Fairlane and moving to the New Monmouth area of Middletown, New Jersey, where his future stepfather resided.

"I was seven or so at the point my mother finally remarried," he says. I liked my stepparent once I met him. Bill Van Zandt was an engineer in the construction field, a friendly, hardworking person. I never saw my natural father again."

Overnight, Steven's modest existence was transformed. Middletown, New Jersey, a Dutch-English colonial settlement, was a middle-class enclave near the coastal center section of the state. Following his adoption in the mid-1950s, the formerly Catholic Steven grew up attending the New Monmouth Baptist Church on Cherry Tree Farm Road with stepiblings Billy, Jr., and Kathi Van Zandt. Weekday afternoons, after Port Monmouth Elementary let out, he played alone in lush Chanceville Park.

Grandpa Sam Lento, his initial guitar mentor, scrutinized young Steven's progress on the scuffed, attic retrieved acoustic as the child picked out the

hectic R&B melody lines. The British invasion was just taking hold when Sam presented him with the "most fantastic, incredible" gift he thinks he may have ever received: a vintage, mint-condition National guitar with gleaming metal resonator.

"I was sitting around with the guitar in front of the TV on a Saturday night in 1965 when the Stones came on 'The Hollywood Palace' program—it was exactly half of the major turning point in my life. The rest of the turnaround came the next night, when I went to a dance at a beach club in nearby Sea Girt. My friend Bruce Gumbert—the other big Bruce in my life—took me there to see a big local group called the Mods. I never quite fit in anywhere as an adolescent, but when I walked in and saw this mop-top band beside this floodlit pool doing 'It's All Over Now,' while the drummer played standing up, I got a brilliant dose of my new role models. Man, I was knocked out."

Steve immediately formed a succession of bands at Middletown High, the worst of them being the Shadows, in which he sang lead, and the best being the Source. "We always won the battles of the bands held locally and at the Asbury Park bandshell on the boardwalk." Triumphs at the boardwalk contests led to work in the sprawling circuit of alcoholless teen clubs along the Jersey coast, including the three branch Hullabaloo chain and the prestigious Le Teen Devious in Shrewsbury.

"The music thing was thriving for me, but the minute I grew my hair long, I went from being an utter misfit to a complete outcast. Even women shunned my ass, to where I didn't get into sex until late in the high school game. Eventually I was thrown out of school temporarily in my senior year for my hair length, and I left home, living with my first girlfriend at her house until every body calmed down.

"Not long after I'd gotten my diploma in 1968, I was standing on Route 35, the main drag in Middletown, waiting for a friend and looking extremely freaky, when the cops picked me up, planted marijuana on me, and framed me on a dope charge. I was so naive, had never seen a joint in my life, and was sure justice would prevail." He groans and shudders with the recollection. "They threw me behind bars, physically harassed me, sprayed me with this nasty insect repellent for a few hours, and then called my parents—who didn't believe my side of the story."

Within days, 18-year old Steven was shorn of his locks, placed on probation for possession of drugs, and assigned by the court to a job at a local supermarket. Feeling more isolated than ever, he sank into an abysmal depression.

"I was so lonesome and alienated to begin with, and now my whole identity, including music, had been taken away. I distinctly remember standing in an aisle of the empty supermarket at night, gripping one of the retractable razors used for opening boxes, deciding to slash myself with the blade and check out of this life."

If his girlfriend, with whom he'd just

broken up, had not walked into the store at that precise moment, Steven believes he would have done it.

"Instead, because I still couldn't face up to things—including being unfairly branded as the town drug addict—I attempted to destroy myself by becoming what my parents and neighbors saw me as being. First came grass, then I went to uppers and downers, and then acid and various other hallucinogens."

An invitation to split from Middletown for a stint with a passing Boston-based combo was the jolt that saved him. When he returned to Jersey several weeks later, he got his own apartment and immersed himself in the expanding Asbury Park bar band community that centered around a gin mill called the Lpstage Club.

"It was open from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.," he says, shaking his head in disbelief, "and you had to pay a few bucks for the right to jam there. The amps and microphones were built into the walls so you wouldn't make off with them. Once the owners accepted your talent, you could play for free. If you got great, you made \$5 for an eight-hour stint. If you were a killer guitarist beyond equal, you got 15 bills to be the leader of the jam session, cranking out endless blues vamps for an audience of drunken cabana boys and junkies, while the management projected porno movies on the wall behind you."

From a ragged assortment of stalwarts—bassist Gary Tallent, drummer Big Bobby Williams, keyboardist David Sancious—Van Zandt created Funky Dusty and the Soul Broom, an outfit that, after adding B. Springsteen on second guitar, became the Sundance Blues Band.

"At this point, we and Southside Johnny Lyon, who lived with me in a flat on Asbury Avenue, were the elite of the losers." Convinced such status was permanent, they let the winds of chance carry them. Springsteen took a hard-rock act dubbed Steel Mill on a West Coast road trip that featured Bay Area showcases at the Matrix and Bill Graham's Fillmore. When Steel Mill returned to the East, Miami Steve became their bassist, and he and Springsteen rode Van Zandt's rattling Austin Healey down to Richmond, Virginia, for several gigs with the Altman Brothers before folding the Mill in early 1971.

Van Zandt hung on for Bruce's short-lived Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom, plus a subsequent 10-piece lineup featuring Stax/Volt-style horns and, ultimately, the Bruce Springsteen Band, which positioned Miami Steve at lead guitar.

"The basis of my friendship with Bruce was that I always trusted his judgment, but in the midst of this era, our solidarity, this profound personal belief I'd invested in him, was tested to its total limits. I maybe shouldn't reveal this, but Bruce took a hideous step at this time and got into—it actually hurts to say it—surfing. He got a fucking board, was wearing the baggy trunks, the whole, awful bit! And this was absolute

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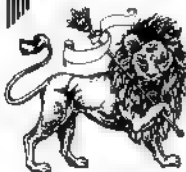
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Face it. If the four women in Fuzzbox had called their album *We've Got a MIDI-compatible Digital Sampling Device and We're Gonna Use It*, it just wouldn't have been the same.

GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUZZ

Article by Glenn O'Brien

Fuzzbox is a band from Birmingham, England. They have a great album called *We've Got a Fuzzbox and We're Gonna Use It*. They sound like all the other bands from Birmingham—Duran Duran, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, UB40, etc.—except that all of their songs have a fuzzbox on them. It's a stolen fuzzbox that is probably as old as the drummer, and it's rumored to be the same one used on the Seeds' hit "You're Pushin' Too Hard" in 1966. The other big difference is that Fuzzbox sounds like a bunch of girls, which it is.

"Led Zeppelin, that's the one we're closest to," says Jo, the bassist with the jet black hair and the broken leg in a cast, who dwarfs Emmanuel Lewis.

Actually Fuzzbox doesn't sound like any of the other rock bands from Birmingham. They remind me a little bit of the 5lits, and sometimes they harmonize like the B-52 girls, Kate and Cindy, but mostly Fuzzbox sounds self-invented, cool, amusing, and artistic. They sound like the tribal orchestra of a bunch of Druid Amazons living in the Rain Forest of the Hollywood Hills.

From the album-sleeve photos I thought they were between the ages of eleven and fourteen (they actually show their "CHILD" railroad passes from 1985), but in fact the women of Fuzzbox are between eighteen and twenty-two—legal adults more or less, old enough to marry, have kids, drive a car, join the army, and in some states to have cocktails and vote. They look like young ladies, not children. Especially without hair extensions and colored hair spray.

I sure wasn't interested in meeting Fuzzbox because they were cute girls. Naturally I wanted to hear them talk. I thought they might be ocular children. The fact that they turned out to be really cute girls, real ladies, and accomplished wise guys was a total plus.

Maybe they're not "accomplished musicians," but maybe they're performance artists, see. They make great sounds and great images. In my opinion their version of "Spirit in the Sky" is the best version ever recorded, and that takes into account some pretty hip work by Norman Greenbaum and Nina Hagen. Their whole album is cool. And on their video, "Love Is the Slug," the drummer drops her sticks in the middle of her solo, which continues, magically.

On stage the Fuzzboxes exchange instruments between songs. It's a lot like changing wigs between songs when you think about it. Anyway, they make me think and laugh and I had tea with them.

SPIN: What had you heard about New York?
Fuzzbox: There's drug pushers and muggers on every streetcorner, loads of stabbings, strip joints. The sidewalks aren't safe. The subways aren't safe.

SPIN: Is there anything you'd like to see here before you leave?

Fuzzbox: A real mugger. We've heard so much about them we'd like to meet one.

SPIN: Can I ask how old you are?

Magz: Don't you know it's very rude to ask a lady how old you are?

SPIN: That's why I said "Can I ask . . ."

Magz: You may.

SPIN: How old are you?

Magz: I'm 22.

Jo: But she'll soon be 23. In fact when we're playing in Detroit.

Vix: 21.

Tina: We're 18.

Jo: In America we're 21. In England we're 18.

According to the mini-legend, the girls—school chums—originally got together for a one-shot gig, opening for a friend's band at a small club. They had never played together. They had barely played separately. They rehearsed three songs for two hours. Vix says, "We were playing so badly we needed something to cover up the mistakes. I blurted out, 'We've got a fuzzbox and we're going to use it.'" Despite the mistakes, they were a hit and got an encore and the offer of a record deal. It sounded too good to be true.

SPIN: How did the band start up?

Fuzzbox Y: Well, we were all down at the methadone clinic one day and we decided, right, we're going to kick drugs, we're going to kick this heroin habit and all . . .

Fuzzbox A: I thought we were in the Royal Philharmonic . . .

Fuzzbox Y: Oh, you're right. We were, weren't we.

Fuzzbox X: We were in the methadone clinic because of the pressures of being in the Royal Philharmonic . . .

Fuzzbox B: Anyway we kicked the habit and . . .

Fuzzbox A: There you go, we did this to get off drugs.

SPIN: So where did the fuzzbox come from?

Fuzzbox: We borrowed it from Maggie's boyfriend along with all the other instruments and we've gotten away with it now. We bought them a replacement.

SPIN: Do they still make them?

Fuzzbox: They still make them, but ours is an antique.

SPIN: Before you hit on the name Fuzzbox did you consider any other names?

Fuzzbox X: Bogie Babies.

Fuzzbox Y: Cherry Head and the Guffs.

SPIN: Do you have any nicknames?

Fuzzbox A: Vicky is often known as Pig or Miss Piggly.

Miss Piggly: It was because of my nose, but it's dropped down since then.

SPIN: Without surgery it just dropped down?

Miss Piggly: Yes, it only looked that way because my sister used to tape my nose up to make me look like a pug dog.

Fuzzbox B: Tina is known as Runty.

Runty: Or carrot face. Or Pixie. Porky. Bottom.

Fuzzbox X: Jo is known as Grumpy.

Grumpy: Or Potato, Hamster Face, Cripple.

Fuzzbox Y: Maggie is known as Witch.

Witch: Hyena, Mouse, Strawberry Face.

Grumpy: And Meryl Streak because of her great acting ability.

SPIN: Do you have any hobbies?

Magz: Sewing, crochet . . .

Jo: Knitting, cookery . . .

Vix: Pressing . . .

SPIN: It sounds like you have husbands.

Jo: No, we're preparing for the day when we



do have one.

SPIN: So what are you looking for in a man?

Magz: A nice clean-shaven lad

Jo: With clean fingernails. . . .

Vix: Someone who looks like Elvis Presley but a bit prettier really

Tina: I don't think it matters much really. As long as they're fairly decent looking.

Magz: I do!

Vix: I've come to terms with it. I realize that none of them will be as fashionable as my other accessories, like my handbag.

Magz: We all like pretty blokes.

SPIN: Where do you find pretty blokes?

Tina: You don't. They're all gay.

SPIN: Do you have any pets?

Tina: I've got a gray and white cat who is fat

like me called Clancy, and I've also got two little baby brown and white rats but my boyfriend looks after them because if I had them my cat would probably eat them and also my mum would probably die

SPIN: Do they have names?

Tina: Bam Bam and Pebbles.

Jo: I have a great-looking dog called Paddy

Fuzzbox. He is cool

Magz: I used to have two cats, but my ex-boyfriend has the cats. I have a kitten called Thomas.

Vicky: I have a big fat massive longhaired Alsatian called Jamie and he's really cool. He barks at anything. A black cat called Robb e. A hamster called Crop Gobbler. A budgie called Ricky. And I've got a chrysalis all ready to hatch out into a butterfly.

The fuzz are looking for a mugger (L-R): Jo, Tina, Magz, Vicki.

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he was disintegrating. Brian really did disintegrate."

"Jumping Jack Flash" was the Stones' single at the time Brian died. Mick sang it at the free concert for 250,000 in New Hyde Park that the Stones gave in honor of Brian a few days before Mick and Marianne left for Australia. Then Mick gave a reading of "Adonis," a poem Shelley had written to eulogize the death of his friend Keats, but before that, he released all these butterflies, which were meant to fly up into the sun, but they had all virtually died in their boxes. They sort of fluttered about and then collapsed from lack of oxygen.

Marianne's career began disintegrating, at least publicly, with her first attempted suicide. Then there were the problems that came with being around Mick Jagger and a lot of money with nothing to do, and the heroin addiction that ensued following their breakup. By 1971 she was strung out, living on the streets of London. Marianne always saw things in terms of absolutes, black or white, good or bad, and always went toward one or the other. A vision did come out of all this, her *Broken English* album, which took her until 1977 to get together. Before that, the only artistic thing she had done that was taken seriously was "Sister Morphine," which took Jagger awhile to admit she had written. Despite *Broken English's* success, Marianne was still a mess. There was no comeback. She just fell back into booze and drugs. It's a minor miracle that *Strange Weather*, her latest album, ever happened.

Marianne had been in New York, in November 1985, working on another record, a record of her own songs. She was having a hard time; she was in the midst of a bad relationship, entering the final stages of alcoholism and drug addiction, on the brink of defeat and unable to admit it. She dealt with it in an unhealthy and indirect way instead, and ended up in treatment. It was an ego-shattering experience, to say the least, but just what she needed. The last straw was when she broke the left side of her jaw, after falling down some stairs as the result of an overdose. She went to Minnesota for six months for treatment with her jaw wired shut. When that was over, she learned she had an infected wisdom tooth on the right side of her mouth, and the right side of her jaw was also broken. By the time she got to Boston, she was in awful pain. She had gone there with a man she met in treatment, to live happily ever after. They had six weeks together before he jumped out a 36th floor window.

"They took away my alcohol, my drugs, food—because I had my jaw wired shut—and my sexual and emotional life was out the window. After going through this awful scene, somehow, a day at a time, I found myself back in the same position I had been in before I went into treatment, working with the same producer on the same record and having the same problems

and, of course, the same suicidal feelings. When I can't deal with something, and I'm unable to say so, I want to destroy myself. Suicidal urges come out like commands. It's not like any other urge, like I'd like a pizza, or I'd like a drink, where you feel like you have a choice. The reason I actually agreed to go into treatment was to change my life, because I was losing what I always had, which was contact with the life force, and that's where I got a lot of my strength. What happened in those last six months in New York was I lost it. I had lost it before, but it always came back. I knew if I had let go now, it wouldn't come back."

This is the same Marianne talking as before, but now she's more lucid, enlightened, and less desperate. It's been a year since she's taken a drink or a drug. She must have had an urge to call Tom Waits, who was a friend, because they began talking on the phone a lot. She was still in the midst of making that other record, and hating it, when she got a call from Chris Blackwell, the head of Island Records, Marianne's label. Blackwell had also spoken to Waits, and they both thought Marianne should do another kind of record, one with songs she really liked. So she did. She chose a lot of standards, like "Boulevard of Broken Dreams," "I Ain't Goin' Down to the Well No More," "Yesterdays," and "Hello Stranger," and some modern classics, like Waits's "Strange Weather," Dylan's "I'll Keep It With Mine," and of course, "As Tears Go By." *Strange Weather's* not exactly rock 'n' roll, but it is her meter. It's like a weather map, beautifully overcast with a lot of highs and lows. It's a depressing album, but wonderfully so, like a Leonard Cohen record or an Ingmar Bergman film. Had things turned out differently, the record could have been a lot more bleak. It could have been the Sid and Nancy story.

"I never liked the word survivor. I think surviving is keeping your head above water. It's something one does to not die. I think there is much more to life than just surviving. What I used to say, in a very arrogant way, is 'I'm not a survivor, I'm a winner.' I don't feel like that now, because I've realized life's not about winning, either. It's finding out about true self. Everyone has one, like everyone has a distorted self, and what we do, a lot of us, is try to run from the true self. I've been trying to avoid my true self for years."

"I cannot reject any of my experiences, and this is not what this life is about. This life is about accepting myself as I was and as I am and keeping it in the here and now. Obviously, I feel I've come around in some kind of circle, not literally, like suddenly I'm a virgin again, but to rerecord "As Tears Go By," the cornerstone of my sensational life, through which I met Andrew Oldham, Mick and Keith and Brian Jones, and now to be doing it again, at age 40, with different people means, somehow, that I want to do it all over again, but slightly differently. It's like being on a high wire, only this time I'm not going to slip."

ROCK AND ROLL IS GOING ON TRIAL



This time it's for real

The nationwide climate of anti-rock hysteria has begun to claim real victims.

- This summer ex-Dead Kennedys vocalist/songwriter Jello Biafra and four others will be tried before a jury in Los Angeles on criminal charges stemming from a record album. Each defendant faces up to a year in prison and a \$2,000 fine. The legal implications of this case are enormous: for music and art and free speech in general.

- The targeted album (*Frankenchrist*, by Dead Kennedys, Alternative Tentacles) included a poster of a painting by the renowned, Oscar-winning artist H. R. Giger.

- An 18-year-old record-store clerk in Callaway, Florida, is slapped with a felony charge for selling a rap music cassette to someone four years her junior. She faces up to five years in prison. The store has already shut its doors.

- In Goshen, Indiana, Marianne Hatfield is targeted by a local church group with death threats and attacks on her children, friends, and property because she publishes a music magazine, *Rock Rag*.

- The FCC picks an alternative news station as its first target in a crackdown on "explicit language" in radio. It moves on to force New York's controversial *Howard Stern Show* out of national syndication.

- New immigration laws are used to bar musicians, speakers, and journalists from entering or appearing in the United States.

- Rock music magazines from SPIN to *Tiger Beat* are removed from Wal-Mart and other convenience stores after a TV evangelist claims the magazines are "pornographic."

The Biafra/*Frankenchrist* trial will be the test case. The prosecution knows it. We know it. And we need your help.

Refusing to plea bargain, Biafra and the four co-defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges in Los Angeles. The costs of the upcoming trial will be very high.

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Of course they didn't prosecute Prince, for the same reason they're not prosecuting the retailer. Because they can hire a good lawyer. They figure (Biafra) doesn't have any money to fight the case. It's really a cowardly system, performing a cowardly act, responding to a cowardly parent.

Frank Zappa, *LA Weekly*

I say (the recording industry) is going to go broke defending themselves... Wait until we start court cases under existing laws. The purpose isn't to win... the purpose is to keep them so tied up that they won't know what hit them.

Judith Toth, Maryland state legislator
Sponsor of anti-rock obscenity statute

What's down the road for us? On "Crystal Night" in 1939, when people started getting rid of the decadent literature in Berlin, they ended up burning all the philosophy books and then went on to destroy all the bookshops run by Jews and from there they decided they might as well go for the music shops and all the rest of it. That's what's always down the road when you begin to censor. Crystal Night.

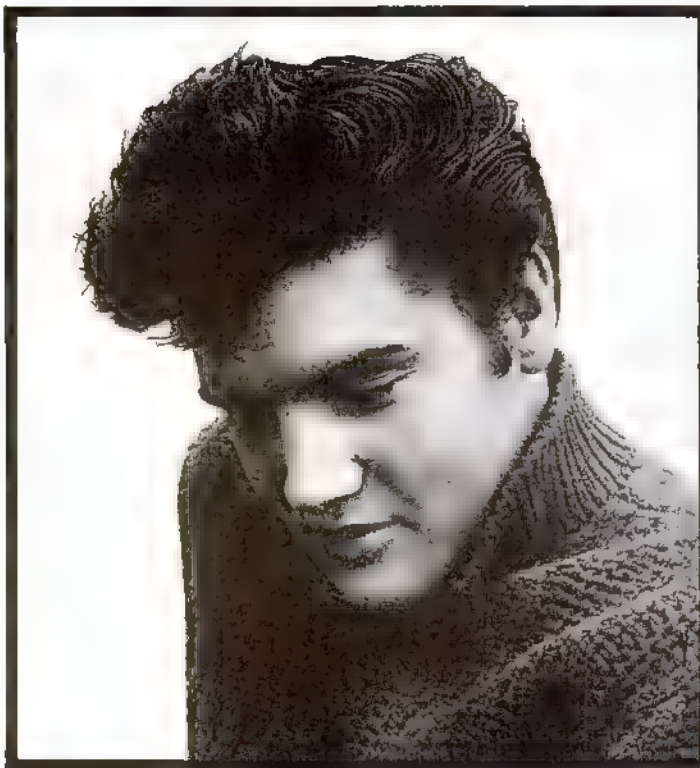
Stephen King, novelist



ANTIHERO

Dead or alive, Elvis has ruled. And now, a decade after the first appearance of his ghost, he rests in terrible peace.

Column by Greil Marcus



This book made me very, very angry. Because I believe that Elvis Presley was a genius. He didn't express himself the way the middle classes do, which is with wordplay and being able to express his actions and reactions. He acted on gut instinct and expressed himself by the way he held the microphone. . . . If you read the books that Elvis read

pause over that line, "If you read the books that Elvis read"; Bono has done research—

they were books of a man who was unsure of himself intellectually. When he should have been sure of himself. He was dragging himself down. . . . I believe the essence of any performer is gut instinct, "and you love though no one told you to. You know but no one told you how." Because it's all in you, it's instinct. That's what Elvis Presley's about. And yet the music business tries to make you explain yourself and explain your actions and reactions. And Elvis couldn't, and felt that he should have been able to. And I think that tore at him, and it shouldn't have torn at him because he was better than all those people. He's better than Albert Goldman, and Elvis Presley could say more in somebody else's song than Albert Goldman could say in any book. . . . Elvis had the wisdom that makes wise men foolish

We got into a fight when Elvis died .
We ran out to some bar in town
Some big mouth drunk was makin' jokes
puttin' Elvis down
My baby gave him fair warnin',
everybody said
But when he sang "Don't Be Cruel"
Baby lost his cool
And shot him dead
—Syd Straw, "Listening to Elvis,"
1985

The '50s, I remember, were pretty tough, uptight—and I'm trying to make the '50s lead into the '60s and show how things opened up, and people's reactions to that. Why a guy like Kerouac would become so important, and Presley, who freed us.
—Ralph Bakshi, on his film *Hey Good Looking*, 1982

They're talkin' again about how to survive nuclear war. But it was that kind of talk, in the '50s, that caused rock 'n' roll to emerge. It was that kind of talk that created the necessity for Marlon Brando and James Dean, and the necessity for young people to need—not like, but need—Elvis Presley.
—Peter Wolf, *Rolling Stone*, 1982

Since leaving Ghana 10 years ago, Elvis

Johnson-Idan, 36, has lived in the north London borough of Brent, where he currently presides over the park department.

He recently received word that the former monarch of his Ghanaian tribe, the Fantis, had died. This makes you king, said the message from Ghana. Power over 10,000 subjects doesn't seem to mean much to the man who will become King Elvis. He will return to London after the coronation. "I'm doing a very important job here," he said, "and I like it very much."

—Leah Garchik, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1986

spa king.
ktell presents
"elvis sings at his own funeral"
—author unknown, c. 1984

Can't you just imagine
Digging up the King
Begging him to sing
About those heavenly mansions
Jesus mentioned
—Warren Zevon, "Jesus Mentioned," 1982

You don't even have to imagine it. He's been dug up again and again since he went into the ground ten years ago. Of

course he sings at his own funeral, a ceremony that has yet to end—who'd you expect, Little Richard?

How does he sound? Great, if you listen to the CDs. As a friend put it, punching up "Jailhouse Rock" and quoting Roland Barthes, "You can actually hear 'the grain of the voice.'" But if you listen to Bono Hewson's shadow-play impersonation on U2's "Elvis Presley and America," he sounds terrible. This is Elvis in the hour before he died, fixed forever, last words, the aural equivalent of what you see on the page of the King's demented letter to the President, asking to be made a "Federal Agent at Large" so he can help stop "The Drug Culture"—not the grain of the voice, just the garble of dope. Zevon finished his song: "He went walking on the water/ He went walking on the water/ He went walking on the water/ With his pills."

Both Bono and Zevon are cursing: cursing what happened to Elvis, and cursing Elvis for letting it happen, for betraying the faith they placed in him. In Bill Flanagan's *Written in My Soul*, an interview collection, Bono explains.

This book by Albert Goldman made Elvis out as being the rock 'n' roll idiot.

Beyond what's self evident, Bono's words, like the words that head this article, say one thing plainly: the question of Elvis Presley remains as alive as the man himself is dead. He remains the specter of possibility—in rock 'n' roll, pop culture, "America," modern life—and he remains the fact of ruin. Solve that question if you can, say the specter and the fact—or else drop the question of who you are, where you came from, where you might end up.

The maggots that first crawled out of his eyes are grandparents to the nth degree, but people are still talking. Bruce Springsteen, for example, in Dave Marsh's *Glory Days*, remembers Elvis on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956: "It was like he came along and whispered a dream in everybody's ear and then we dreamed it." Dreamed what? "The American Dream," presumably, a now-horrible cliché best summed up by A. Whitney Brown on a recent *Saturday Night Live*:

. . . And what is the American dream? It's different things to different people. To a farmer, it's a bountiful harvest, that he can sell, for a lotta money. To a photographer, it's a beautiful picture, that he can sell, for a lotta money. To a soldier, it's becoming a general, so that

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he can sell weapons to a foreign country, for a lotta money.

But maybe I can best express the American dream in a story. It's about a kid who grew up in Tupelo, Mississippi, in the early 1950s. He was a poor kid, but he had a rockin' guitar, some flashy clothes, and a wiggle in his hips—and he had that certain something, called "talent." Of course, he never made a nickel, because he was black, but two years later Elvis Presley made a fortune doing the same thing . . .

Which isn't what he meant at all, Springsteen goes on to say: "... the TV, the cars, the houses—that's not the American dream. Those are the booby prizes. And if you fall for them—if, when you achieve them, you believe this is the end in and of itself—then you've been suckered in. Because those are the consolation prizes, if you're not careful, for selling yourself out or lettin' the best of yourself slip away."

The Elvis Presley we read about in filler items in the daily papers is the booby prize. No, says Priscilla, the media widow (divorced from Elvis before he died, she can't quite be the real thing), it isn't true that she and daughter Lisa Marie have turned over the entire Presley estate to the Church of Scientology, though the Church has brought both mother and daughter a peace beyond price. On the other hand, Priscilla confides, it is true that having already chopped up Elvis's Bel Air house and bronzed the bricks and sold them at Graceland, she is now ready to unload the furniture, tables on which the hands once placed a Pepsi, chairs into which the corpse actually sank (probably she didn't bother to have 'em dry-cleaned, maybe there'll be a telltale stain?). The prices are high, but . . . "I never saw such junk in my life," said a fan. "My god, what would Elvis think?"

Over at the Berkeley Psychic Institute, also known as the Church of the Divine Man, they're working on the problem. In fact, they go to the source almost every day: Elvis has been "channeled."

"I think Elvis Presley will never be solved," Nick Tosches wrote in *Country* in 1977, just after Elvis's death. Tosches had just finished celebrating the flip side of Elvis's first record, "Blue Moon of Kentucky," cut with producer Sam Phillips at Sun Records in Memphis on July 5, 1954: "Like a young boxer after his first professional knockout, Presley is dizzy with the confirmation of his prowess. 'Blue Moon of Kentucky' is daring to the point of mania. It is Elvis walking on steel blades, through orange-white flames, invincible with the knowledge he sees in Sam's eyes, hears in his own voice, and feels in his own flushed skin; the knowledge that right now, this moment, he, Elvis Aron Presley, is the greatest singer in Memphis and the universe." Never put better, that was what the world responded to, the leaping sense that in an instant the world could be turned upside down. "Nothing," Tosches wrote of Elvis leaving that first realized moment, "not sex, not the eyes of bank

tellers, would ever again disarm with its mystery." That is the wisdom that makes wise men foolish, but the gnosis that dissolves all mystery is its own mystery—what is that leaping sense of transformation, exactly? Where does it come from? Where does it go? Is it real at all?—and that mystery is what people are still talking about. It's what Tosches was talking about, what he said would never be solved: the fact that, emerging from the orange-white flames of "Blue Moon of Kentucky," Elvis immediately "declared his idol to be Dean Martin, the 37-year-old Italian pop singer from Steubenville, Ohio." This, Tosches said,

painkillers, in pill form and injections, to try to get some relief . . . the Jesse being was [the original Elvis said before he died] "some kind of sex maniac," bragging to his stepmother that he had slept with more than 1,000 women.

Those women meant nothing to the "true" Elvis, whose greatest love of his life was his mother Gladys. . . . In a psychic reading held at the Berkeley Psychic Institute, Gladys Presley was channeled through Reverend Rose Letsgo. When asked why Elvis died at the same time as she, almost to the day of the year Gladys replied that "We were Siamese twins in a past life."



Edel Roberts

"is modestly terrifying."

Back at the Church of the Divine Man, where terror is merely a hoie in the aura of the insufficiently evolved, there are no questions without answers, no problems that cannot be solved. Here one can find people who have finally put the "Blue Moon of Kentucky"/Dean Martin split to rest, casting it in less esoteric terms, those of "the Rebel and the Good Boy." This is the "duality" that has dominated Presley iconography for thirty years, and Elvis's soul since January 8, 1935, when he emerged from the womb of Gladys Presley twinned to a stillborn Jesse Garon, who was buried in a shoebox. But the spirit would not die. As Elvis told his channeler, Bill Falcone, both he

and his brother struggled for control of the surviving body. Elvis the Rebel (the Jesse spirit) wore sideburns and wild pink and black clothes and worshipped James Dean. Elvis the Good Boy (the original spirit) was deeply religious. . . . The struggle between the two spirits in Elvis's body only intensified as Elvis became a star. The Jesse Garon being, the destroyer, started to shoot out TV sets during violent outbursts. He surrounded himself with southern buddies and developed an obsession for guns, becoming increasingly paranoid as his strange, cloistered nightlife was termed decadent and demented. The [true] Elvis spirit took uppers, downers, and

So there you have it: the real Elvis liked Dean Martin and went on to a life of torment and pain. The false Elvis made "Blue Moon of Kentucky" and had a good time. The corollary is that rebellion, like the rebel, is born dead.

For the moment, this is where the story stops, returned to the piety of Elvis's beginnings, to Jesus's mansions (though in this Father's house there is only one), or to the occult, where Elvis ended, to the spiritualist tracts that occupied him in his last days (he was reading *The Face of Jesus*, about the Shroud of Turin, when he died). Both sides of the story are fecund: Warren Zevon's "Jesus Mentioned" is a great song, as good as anything on Elvis Costello's *King of America* (the referents tumble like counters in a slot machine, who knows what you'll get?), and occultism reveals the secret contours of the story, of our helpless commitment to it. Versions appear everywhere, as in the May 12 *Village Voice* story on Neal Jimenez, scenarist of *River's Edge*, and also of an unshot screenplay "called *Son of Elvis*—about a girl who pushes to the front of an Elvis concert in '56, touches the King's finger, becomes pregnant as a result, and has a son who must bear the burden of [Elvis's] lineage some 20 years later." We can laugh at the Church of the Divine Man, but Jimenez is working on the same level, and who wouldn't want to see his movie?

This, I think, is where the story has to go now: underground, into fantasy, into retreat from the spectacle we are about to witness. On August 16, Elvis's Death Day, untold thousands from around the world will gather in Memphis. Every network will run a spot or a special ("Not a 'smirk story,'" a producer for CBS's *West 57th Street* said to me on the phone, "we're going serious"). There will be cable TV documentaries and retrospectives (at least three are in the works) and magazine covers. There will even be *Elvis: Undercover*, a comic book published by Mad Dog Graphics, in which Elvis's dream of fighting "The Drug Culture" as a "Federal Agent at Large" will finally come true.

The media overkill will be so bloated, and so empty, that people will likely begin to turn away. They will turn away even from the still shocking footage of what Elvis Presley did on stage in the mid-'50s: movements so suggestive, not merely of things sexual, but of all possibility, that were they not now safely contextualized as "history" we would find them shocking today. Elvis Presley will be blown up, splattered into a million fragments. As I write in May, each of those fragments still retains a link to a totality, to a story much bigger than that of one man, one time; after August 16 each fragment will be just a piece of a story that can no longer be put back together, that can no longer be told.

It's time for it. The stories about Elvis are old now; they've been told too many times. Almost every recording has been issued, the chest of relics is almost empty. Save for scattered cults, most of them in the South, filled with working-class people not unlike Elvis (people who, as Bono said, cannot explain their "actions and reactions"), or in Europe, filled with people for whom Elvis is fundamentally exotic, people will stop talking. The books will stop selling: even Lucy de Barbin and Dary Matera's new *Are You Lonesome Tonight: The Untold Story of Elvis Presley's One True Love—and the Child He Never Knew* . . . even that. We will rest in peace.

As for Elvis, he will become a poster as fixed, as simple, and as sterile as the movie-still posters of Marlon Brando (*Wild One*-slouch), James Dean (*Rebel Without a Cause*-slouch), and Marilyn Monroe (skirts billowing up in *The Seven-Year Itch*). In place of the unfathomable multiplicity Elvis Presley has signified for three decades, there will be a single, uninteresting image, at once specific and generic, signifying nothing.

For the first time, Elvis will be really dead. For the first time, people will stop talking. There will be nothing left to say. And then, 20 years later, when the people who stopped talking have passed, when the specter that this year will lay to rest has had the sleep it needs, when all the reissues of obscure Sun outtakes like "When It Rains, It Really Pours" have been forgotten, when even Desirée Presley ("the Child He Never Knew") has forgotten, someone like Neal Jimenez will make his movie, and it will all come back. 4

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WHEN DO

At the Playland video arcade in Times Square, young street hustlers practice for World War III in between drug deals. Killing time between killing video soldiers, spacemen, and civilians is something they take very seriously. No one talks much, no one smiles. While quarters drop and reflexes are tested, Ken and Brian Foreman of Thrashing Doves try to maintain the composure expected of aspiring British pop stars while leaping in and out of a photo booth.

The Foremans thought that being a hit on college radio and getting an *Interview* photo spread meant they'd get to play male models in a posh American photography studio. Instead, they're jumping and posing in a space no larger than your average Johnny on the spot, and they can't even close the curtain. And it's here in Times Square, where two conspicuously pale young men in black and white can perch precariously on a stool while holding each other's pointy booted feet in the air without anyone taking notice.

The Thrashing Dove brothers don't as a rule carry on this way, at least not offstage. "English people are more reserved," says Ken, lead singer. "Kids are bred to be seen and not heard."

"We're told to go play in the garden so the adults can listen to the grandfather clock," keyboardist Brian adds.

"Whereas in America," Ken continues, "you get these really arrogant kids because their parents have been encouraging them to be expressive. It might not always lead to very nice people, but it's an asset in a band to have a depth of security in performing."

To compensate for his national disadvantage, Ken sings like a ham actor might talk—overexcitedly, nervously, campishly—as if he were parodying his Bowdette countrymen, but much, much more nasal. Ken's thespian sensibility puts an ironic spin on all that Thrashing



Shadow boxing with the Thrashing Doves (L-R) Ian Button, Brian Foreman, Ken Foreman, Kevin Sargent

THES WHINE

Doves do, and since his and Brian's melodies rise and fall like highly animated speech, the brothers' ditties about Vietnamese boat people, heroin addicts, and bombed-out boutiques come across cutesy-poo cheerful.

Which you might think would endear them to the audience that embraced the impossibly cheery image of Curiosity Killed the Cat.

Why have Curiosity become the new English teen screams while Thrashing Doves go hungry?

"I could say why them instead of us I couldn't say why them," Ken quips.

"They've probably slept with more journalists than we have," answers Brian.

Still, Ken has the good looks of a Curiosity, the type you see in those BBC public TV films about an Evelyn Waughian prep-school boy who is so angelically pretty he daily finds himself pushed headfirst into toilets. Since Brian cultivates a more mature image with long black leather coats, Steve McQueen prescription shades, and a prematurely receding hairline, it comes as a surprise that at 23, he is two years Ken's junior. Even during the photo shoot, Brian acts out the role of the more self-assured older brother, while Ken fumbles shyly. How does this Dorian Gray manage to make his kid brother look like an old man?

"I guess it's the result of thinking young and not drinking as much," Ken offers.

The pair hail from Bromley, a commuter-belt suburb southeast of London. "It's a bit like a campsite because everybody's lives exist in London during the day, and then the rest of their lives exist in their front rooms with their families," Ken explains.

"There was a cinema, but they built a McDonalds in its place," says Brian.

"The only thing to recommend the area was David Bowie and the Rolling Stones," says Ken.

"And Siouxsie and the Banshees. Didn't Billy Idol come from there?" Brian asks.

"And Sex Pistols and T. Rex," Ken responds.

"Looking back, it had a good effect on us because it gave us encouragement to try something different," Brian explains. "You could either leave school, live with your parents, and work in a bank, or you could find some kind of escape. In 1977, when we were still in school, you didn't need any musical ability to be in a band."

"And we didn't have any," Ken continues. "I think if anyone had actually seen us at the time, we could perhaps have been nominated as the worst band in the world."

The brothers started out as part of a punk power trio, with Ken on guitar and vocals, Brian on bass and backing vocals, and anyone on drums they could find. As punk begat synth-pop, the Foremans met up with guitarist Ken Button in 1982, Brian graduated to keyboards, and the threesome became the Climb. They opened up for the Alarm, the Boomtown Rats, and the Pretenders, and released three indie singles. The Climb split after two years, only to reform, with drummer Kevin Sargent, as Thrashing Doves.

"We were one of the hippest new bands around, but when we signed with A&M, we suffered an immediate backlash," Ken recalls. "Until we came to America we never realized how oppressive the pressure of the English press is on bands to be independent and to not come out of themselves or be real performers. There's always been this thing about British bands that you're supposed to stand with your back to the audience, wear black, and be really weird."

Upon signing with A&M, the band made a demo and through the Pretenders, the tape got to AOR guru Jimmy Iovine. Through other channels, the tape got to Chris Thomas, whose production credits include Roxy Music and the Sex Pistols, and remix-wiz Arthur Baker. Thrashing Doves decided to take the leap and work with all three.

"Arthur Baker pursued us a long

time," remembers Ken. "Because we were in New York, we decided to let him have a go at mixing 'Matchstick Flotilla.'"

"I think he was in a kind of drug period," Ken says. "We bumped into him in England the other week and he was saying how much he sorted himself out now and that he's not done drugs for six months and that he's been working really hard."

"When he was mixing 'Matchstick Flotilla,'" Brian recalls, "it was like he was having a thousand ideas a minute."

"He was speeding away," Ken interjects.

"But he couldn't actually get them into a whole thing," says Brian.

In America, Thrashing Doves have joined the ranks of British bands like the Smiths and the Cure who have sold records primarily through college radio. But back home, the group haven't found their niche. Ken's idiosyncratic singing has so far made them something other than the obvious choice for the pop charts, and the instrumental polish of their *Bedrock Vice* debut makes them too upscale for England's shambolic alternative music scene.

However, Thrashing Doves did find a brief moment in the limelight because of an endorsement by Margaret Thatcher. To get the young vote, the prime minister appeared on the children's TV show *Saturday Superstore* as part of a video-judging panel. The clip to Thrashing Doves' "Beautiful Imbalance," which features shots of Brian holding a toy cruise missile, went up against videos by Style Council and ex-Wham! dancers Pepsi & Shirie.

"I loved it," said Thatcher. "I liked the constant movement. I liked the color. There's always something going on. I'd give it a four." By unanimous vote, "Beautiful Imbalance" won.

The next day, the Sunday morning headlines read "Margaret Thatcher Votes For Anti Nuclear Song." "Ironically," Ken explains, "the song was about the imbalance of love. It was only in the video we put in the rocket be-

On college radio, Thrashing Doves are this year's Johnny come lately, the new kids in town. But will college radio still love them when they're not around?

Article by
Barry Walters

Photography by
Chris Carroll

cause we were thinking about other imbalances."

"But the show didn't have any political consequences," Brian points out. "Everybody knew she didn't know what the fuck she was talking about."

Back at Playland, a sense of poetic justice is restored. No veteran producers are clamoring for the chance to work with Thrashing Doves, no world leaders are praising the band's imagery. Inside the photo booth, the Foreman brothers try to maintain their balance on that stool for one last shot. Meanwhile, an angry young pusher scores another round at Donkey Kong, stops worrying, and learns to love the button. Such are the challenges to the composition of today's aspiring British pop stars.

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moving images

Here in the saloon, where the bartenders rough each other up while Japanese tourists smile and take pictures, a poster on the wall announces the coming of *The White, the Yellow and the Black*. Beneath the legend, in bold colors, a group of cowboys stands beside an enormous cactus and the neatly stacked bodies of half a dozen samurai. Surrounding this scene are posters for other epics shot in the desert just outside: *How the West Was Won*; *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*; *For a Few Dollars More*; *A Fistful of Dollars*; and the lesser classics: *A Pistol for Ringo* and *The Valley of the Gwangi*.

It is here, to this giant gravel pit of a desert enclosed by ugly brown mountains at the southern edge of Spain's Sierra Nevada, that Alex Cox has come to film *Straight to Hell*, the follow-up to *Repo Man* and *Sid and Nancy*. And the work is in progress.

"Cut!"

On a set littered with battered Fords and empty wine bottles, the action is in full swing. One more time, various members of the Pogues, posed as the McMahon gang in long coats and black hats of varying enormity, mount their trusty trucks—each decorated with skulls, horns, and the family motto, "La Vida Vale Nada"—and ride into town, dragging the remains of a Vespa scooter and its rider. Outside the hacienda, they laugh villainously and begin unloading their spoils, which turn out to be bags of coffee beans and espresso machines.

A tall, tanned, emaciated man in a T-shirt and khaki shorts, his straggly blond hair tied back with a black scarf, and beads around his neck, turns to the cameraman. "How was it for you?" he asks, with post-coital tenderness. Then, loudly, "We'll go again, but this time with more dust and more sweat!" This is Alex Cox. His T-shirt reads, "Fear and Loathing in Almeria."

Make-up girls rush to spray more sweat on mean McMahon faces, while over by the hardware store—outside of which hang dead birds and a selection of human bones—the crew starts up the wind machine and busily throws more dust in front of it. The continuity woman steps forward to point out some discontinuity, but Cox cuts her off: "Shut it! This is a B-movie, so let's fucking go!"

While we wait, in the blazing heat, for the cameras to roll again, producer Eric Fellner summarizes the film's plot. "Basically, three guys come to town and everybody gets killed." But as a quick reading of the script reveals, this is not your average spaghetti western.

What, for example, would Sergio Leone have made of Karl the hot dog vendor ("Weiner, sir? Blood pudding?")



Dowes and Starr

HELL ON REELS

On the set of *Straight to Hell* with Alex Cox and Joe Strummer.

Or Fabienne, the woman with the bad French accent in the hardware store ("Where is ze car?")? Or Hives, the attentive butler to the McMahons ("Care for a mint, sir?")? Or the godless preacher ("Let us get this part over with quickly, Lord, and on with the vengeance.")? "And who's that?" I wonder, as some frightful Las Vegas vision in sequined white suit, black wig, and frilly orange shirt walks past singing a burst of "Delilah." "Oh, him," says Eric as if it were obvious, "that's Kim Brousson." Kim walks past again, clutching a can of beer and singing "The Party's Over."

"Silencio por favor!" This is Joe, the

first assistant director. "Roll over!" And then Alex's voice shouting "Action!" And again and again the McMahons keep arriving in town, until it's right and until it's lunchtime.

"This film's about sexual tension," Alex explains, pushing food around his plate tensely. "There are 750 guys in this town and only five women, and no one ever gets laid. We wrote it," he adds, "for people we knew."

So here they all are at lunch, the people Alex Cox knows, friends who are professional actors and friends from the world of pop. Sy Richardson, the black cowboy with the pink shower cap and the gold tooth, is saying his pre-meal

prayers, and next to him Courtney Love, wearing what looks to be a sort of miniskirt for expectant mothers, sucks the beads around her neck in a sulkily flirtatious way and informs whoever will listen that she spent last night with "the director, the director of photography, the assistant director," and so on. "Me and another starlet."

"Man, that would have been cool," draws Zander Schloss, dressed in the uniform of hot-dog vendor Karl, to Elvis Costello, who has just proposed writing a musical about the assassination of Andrew Lloyd Webber. Elvis, fresh from his recent success as a failed magician in Alan Bleasdale's *No Surrender*, figures in *Straight to Hell* as the grubbily attired Hives, the butler. "You wouldn't want to be me," he sings, idly plucking a guitar. Zander, who plays with West Coast post-punks the Circle Jerks and was the grocery clerk in *Repo Man*, bangs his hands on the table in a vain attempt to kill the flies crawling over his food. "Man, that's a cool song," he says.

Across the room, Joe Strummer, who wears a black suit and an unbuttoned white shirt, with dried blood on his arm and stubble on his chin, rests a gun on the table in front of him. "Don't ask me, I'm not a musician!" he bawls at a member of the crew, and goes back to talking movies with a troubled-looking and gray-haired Jim Jarmusch, better known as a director than an actor. Cast in *Hell* as a ruthless business tycoon, he complains, "I'm not sure I feel good about what I did today."

And neither feeling nor looking good are most of the Anglo-Irish band the Pogues, who last worked with Alex Cox on the controversial video for their single "A Pair of Brown Eyes." Jem Finer, with the addition of false whiskers and a lot of padding, plays the increasingly ga ga Grandpa McMahon ("How's Grandma?" "Still dead, Grandpa.") Beside him is Philip Chevron, with an extravagantly disgusting bullet hole painted on his forehead, who plays the gun-shy Ed. ("If in doubt," one of the crew advises, "they're the ones without the teeth.")

Other Pogues loll around in varying states of semi-consciousness. Spider Stacy laughs manically to himself as he rows up thin white lines (of salt) on the table, and beckons producer Eric over for a snort. And Shane MacGowan continues an animated, drunken conversation about the fall of Rome with an English ex-pat in a handlebar moustache who has rented his Bentley to the production. "I bet the Celts were there," Shane insists.

In the center of it all, Alex is talking about a few of his favorite films. "Yeah,"

Article by Simon Banner



"I think about acting 24 hours a day," Strummer says. "I've had an intense life, so I've got a lot of experience to draw on. There isn't a town in the world I haven't run amok in!"

he says, "I always loved American westerns, but the spaghetti westerns best of all. I used to go and see things like *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* time and time again. I always knew about this place too and was dying to come and see it. One year I tried riding my bicycle through Spain, but I didn't get any further than Alicante.

"I came here first in about 1975," he recalls, "and I remember telling this man that I'd played an emaciated child in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. He believed me, I think. And then I used to come here every year—I'd tell all my girlfriends what a good time they'd have—because the place really tripped me out."

"Tripped out," along with "full on"—as in "he's a full-on guy"—presumably doesn't linger from the 32-year-old Cox's English childhood days in the Wirral, nor from his stint as a law student at Oxford, but from his time, at the start of the '80s, as a Fulbright scholar at UCLA film school. It was there that Cox made his first film (a short, memorably entitled *Sleep Is for Sissies*), before emerging with his startling first feature, *Repo Man*, probably the most bizarre car-chase movie of all time.

He's remained the iconoclast who still dreams of "doing something really dreadful to Steven Spielberg" and mutters darkly about "the reactionary right wing's stranglehold on Hollywood." Eric talks in terms of millions of dollars for their next project—the true story of William Walker, American mercenary and first president of Nicaragua—shot on location with leads Ed Harris and Marlee Matlin. The days of making low-budget movies with casts of friends are perhaps almost over.

Even *Straight to Hell*, with a relatively tiny budget of around \$1 million and originally intended as "a working holiday," features two names clearly included as box-office bait: Grace Jones and Dennis Hopper. Both flew in for a day's shooting last week. Expect five minutes on the credits, then one minute on the screen.

"If that's commercial compromise, I can handle it," Alex insists. "They were both a trip to work with and gave great

performances. What you should really know about this movie though," he says, "is that the story bears a considerable resemblance to a bunch of movies made in Italy and Spain in the 1960's called the *Django* movies, the first of which was banned in Britain for violence, though you can get it on video now. The sequel was called *Django Kill*, and the British censor removed half an hour of cannibalism, homosexuality, and all kinds of good stuff like that. It's a brilliant, dangerously insane film, and *Straight to Hell* is part of that tradition. And this is what I have in mind for the poster," he says, pulling out a copy of a battered Spanish paperback. On the cover a voluptuous, scantily clad heroine and a gunslinging hero look on as a vulture tears out the tongue of a hanged man. "I did order a trained vulture for the movie," he says with an air of regret, "but it didn't arrive."

Back on the set, things are moving. Alex prepares to shoot the final scenes of the day, one explaining how Philip Chevron as Ed comes to have such an ugly hole in his forehead. "Roll over!" someone shouts. Assorted Pogues stir themselves, roll over, and fall back to sleep.

Courtney Love observes, in a speech that sounds rehearsed for the acceptance of her first Oscar, "Alex has brought things out in me that I didn't know were there. With Alex, we all just method out."

Out-methoding everybody, though, is Joe Strummer. He looks like he hasn't taken his costume off for a month. "I haven't," he says, twirling his Frontier 45 on his finger, "and I've hardly left the set either." Some nights he's curled up with a blanket in the hacienda. Others he's slept in the weathered Ford parked behind it.

He sits there now, amidst a litter of strips of Spanish stamps, empty wine bottles, and candles, tugging at the wheel as if he were going somewhere, his gun resting on the dashboard. "I'm a poser," he says. "I can twirl a gun great, but I can't shoot for fuck. I'm a heap of trash. I'll bang any woman and kill any man, and I'll think nothing of it. I'm bad energy, man."

Scenes from a Carnage: Courtney Love, Elvis Costello, Joe Strummer, Sy Richardson, Dick Rude, and Dennis Hopper on the set of Alex Cox's new spaghetti western *Straight to Hell*

Is this Joe talking, or his character, Simms?

"It's the same thing, man," he says crossly, tugging at the wheel with sudden violence. If there's madness in Joe's method, there's also method in the madness. He's set, according to most of the cast of *Straight to Hell*, to emerge as one of its stars.

"I think about acting 24 hours a day," he says. "It's what I want to do, to be an actor. Not an actor though. I'm not going to go to drama school. I've discovered that there's a lot more to acting than just learning the lines. I've had an intense life, so I've got a lot of experience to draw on. There isn't a town in the world I haven't run amok in!"

"Simms!" someone shouts. "We need Simms!" Up Joe jumps, grabbing his gun and twirling it round his blistered fingers. "I'd like to live in the mountains," he says as we trudge up one of them, followed by half the cast and most of the crew, to get the final shot of the day. "It's beautiful at night. You can see every star in the solar system. I've seen four shooting stars."

By now it's seven o'clock and the light's already fading as we look down on the set of Blanco Town. In the little square a car is overturned, its headlights switched on. The desert around it is turning an unlikely shade of pink in the evening sun. "It looks brilliant," Alex says by walkie-talkie to the crew concealed down there, "so let's go with the smoke." Smoke begins to curl up from the chimneys of the hacienda and the hardware store.

Up here Joe (as Simms), Sy Richardson (as Norwood), Dick Rude (as Willy), and Courtney Love (as the pregnant Velma) prepare for their arrival in Blanco Town. And down the mountain they go, Velma trailing behind, banknotes falling from her suitcase. Beside the camera Alex howls like a coyote, pausing only to throw more banknotes into the air. "And again!" he says, "and again!" until it's too dark to go on. "Which take shall we print?" asks Tom Richmond, the man behind the camera. "Print 'em all," Alex shouts gleefully, still throwing money in the air and howling.

"That was a trip. Print 'em all." ☛



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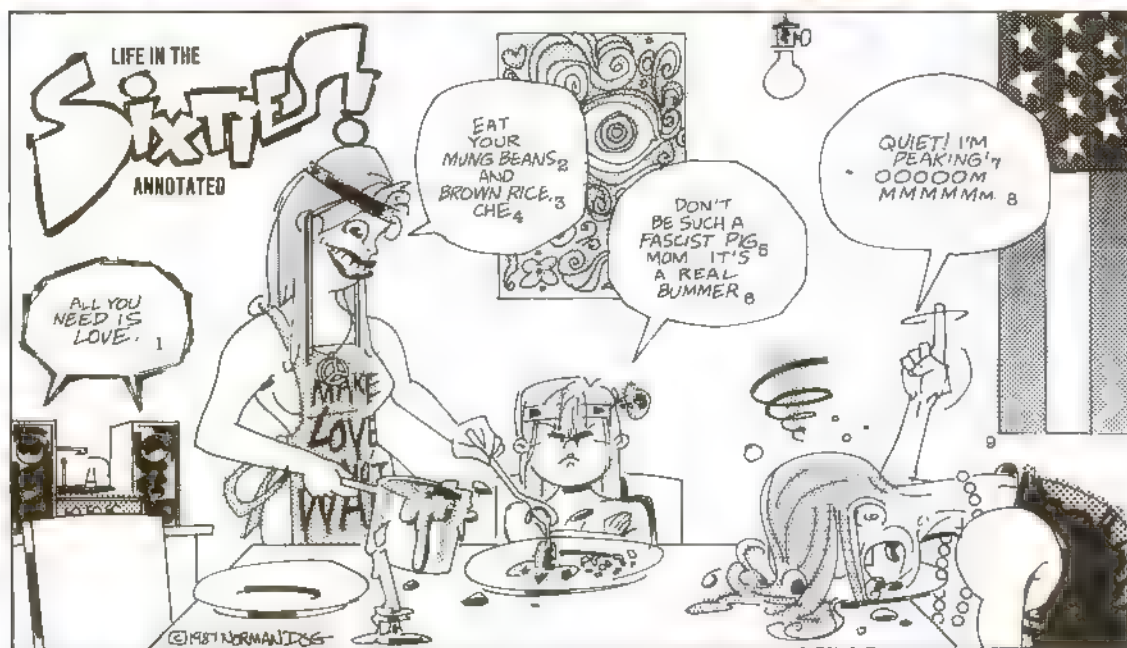
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"... We unscrewed the lightbulbs in the subway. Then we all yelled 'Darkness! Darkness!'"

RUSSIAN YOUTH from page 49

gather experience from life? We send them to die in Afghanistan, but we don't take them seriously. Parents watch the film to learn something about their children. Young people start to cry because they recognize themselves."

Shades of the Vietnam era! Old enough to die, old enough to vote. Multimedia installations. Experimental film. Herbal medicine and ecology. Punks. Video games. Gorbachev has thrown open the doors to all manner of subversion, only to find something akin to post-'60s Western youth culture. Or so we are told.

For our media, *glasnost*, which promises Western freedom to an Eastern society, is a contradiction in terms. In *glasnost*, we simultaneously see "us" and "not us." Before *glasnost*, the press dances with the frustration of a monkey before a mirror. If you indulge this metaphor of the monkey, art is the mirror before us. *Glasnost* presents a debate about freedom, but it implies a debate about the arts as well.

RUSSIAN PUNKS ON GLASNOST

"My name is Tarvo, and these other guys are Venna and Villu. We're one of ten punk bands in Tallinn. Punk is the greatest. It has the strength to throw things over, it's iconoclastic, but the only pop star in the U.S.S.R. is Gorbachev. He's better than the people before him. The media picks us up much less now and sometimes we can even perform publicly."

RUSSIAN VIDEO KIDS ON GLASNOST

"My name is Oksana. The girl I have on the leash is called Arizona. We're actresses. Our idols are Andy Warhol and Keith Haring. We're in rehearsal for our first independent video clip in the Soviet Union. The title: *Don't Cry, Tatiana*. It tells the exciting adventures of two girls in the metropolis Moscow. The two girls, that's us."

Soup cans, framed, in an art gallery: It's a long-established truism that '60s Pop Art eradicated the distinction between "high" and "low" art, between culture and commerce, between artist and entrepreneur.

But as the nearest art-school veteran will tell you, in this century the idea that the artist is part of, rather than outside of society, is a Russian idea. It is even a communist idea.

From the industrial clothes of Kraftwerk and New Order to the industrial music now a cliché in fashion shows from Milan to Tokyo, from the Constructivist interiors of "new wave" discos to the Constructivist graphics on the covers of the records they play; from furry hip-hop headgear to yuppie T-shirts, early Soviet art is... chilly. And ubiquitous.

Back in the U.S.S.R., in a youth club, East Bam is hunched in the pose adopted by all the great hip-hop mixmasters, bent low over his music, the reels of the tape machine spinning slowly and solemnly beneath his dramatically raised hands. A high school kid in an American college sweatshirt is on the dance floor. He too made an appearance in *Is It Difficult to Be Young?*—truly a coincidence. "Actually," he says, "I'd rather not be as... transparent as I became through the movie." No charter member of the Brat Pack could have said it more sincerely. "I've said things in there I wouldn't tell my parents." It's the dilemma of being a teen in a totalitarian state: who's more dangerous, the premier or your parents?

RUSSIAN PERFORMANCE ARTISTS ON GLASNOST

"We don't give our names because you can never tell who comes after Gorbachev. Just this: we are performance artists, the best in all Moscow. Our sign reads: 'The Soviet Union is the cradle of avant garde.'"

RUSSIAN PAINTERS FEEL THE CULTURAL THAW

"My name is Goscha Ostresow. I am what is called a nonconformist painter. But since *glasnost*, the borders between conformist and nonconformist get kind of hazy."

The art exhibition is being held in a planetarium that had once been an officially sanctioned church known as "God's Ear," in tribute to the number of electronic bugging devices planted there by the KGB. The evening is a frenzy of arty activities: biting futuristic essays are being read, and a poem entitled "The Early History and the Postmodern Nightlife." Some of the visitors are trying to explain to the museum guard the meaning of the term *deconstruction*, but with little success. In front of a cardboard carton with the words *Video Malaria* on it, one of the exhibiting artists explains, apparently unafraid of "God's Ear," that "Gorbachev's attempt to correct the mistakes made by Stalin and Brezhnev is terrific. All he has to do now is handle Lenin and we'll be ecstatic."

The musician Janis Kulakows appears in his Lennon glasses and turtle-neck sweater. His band, Perkins ("Thunder"), was banned for one year for allegedly inciting disruptive behavior. He is less than enamored of *glasnost*. "Yeah," he says, "the conditions have improved. But just because something is allowed, it doesn't mean you have to do it."

As the cocktail glasses rattle with ice and the talk grows louder and wilder by the moment, Irina, who works at the state-sanctioned Gosconcert music agency, has finally had enough. "*Glasnost*? I can't hear it anymore! The word is being killed and buried through overuse." She can't help herself, all the same, from taking a stab at defining it. "If truth is a dog, then *glasnost* is a rabid bitch."

LITTLE STEVEN from page 59

anathema on the Asbury music scene to begin with, because those surfers were our mortal enemies, forever beating us musicians up and causing us endless grief

"So one afternoon, Bruce asks me to come down with him to Long Branch, trying to talk me into going surfing with him. I can still see him standing on the sand, holding up his fiberglass board, and I can't even bear to glance at the damned thing. I watch, my face turns to stone from the horror I feel, as my buddy paddles out to catch his opening wave of the afternoon. He gets into position with the rest of the surfers, turns the board around, the wave comes and rises and whoosh—his board flies up, slams him square in the face, and literally knocks his front teeth out.

"As he comes out of the water, his mouth and head are a disgusting mass of blood, and I don't know what the fuck to say to him, because this is exactly what I expected to happen. He drags his board along the beach, so sorry-looking, and kinda peeks at me. Then he shrugs and goes home. And the punch line, the most painful part of the whole story, is that he kept on surfing for at least another two years!"

By the time Springsteen signed to Columbia Records, Van Zandt had been sidetracked as cofounder of Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes. He provided only stray guitar feedback to "Lost in the Flood" on *Greetings from Asbury Park* and lent a backing vocal and horn

arrangement for Born to Run's "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out" before joining the E Streeters full time. And even then, he devoted considerable energy to producing a string of Jukes LPs, the first three of which (*I Don't Want to Go Home*, *This Time It's for Real*, *Hearts of Stone*) remain fairly edifying contributions to the whole Asbury legacy

"But mostly I had tunnel vision about myself and my role in things," Steven says. "I was caught up in this blind forward drive. The binders didn't come off until 1980, when we were pretty much one of the biggest bands in the world."

For all the acclaim and attendant freedom that Steven Van Zandt had won, he felt famished. His main solace was his four-year relationship with his wife, Maureen.

"The finest day of my miserable existence was New Year's Eve, 1982, when Maureen and I got married at the Harkness House in Manhattan. Percy Sledge sang 'When a Man Loves a Woman' as we came down the aisle, Little Milton playing the piano. Bruce was best man, and he couldn't get the ring out of the box. Little Richard performed the ceremony, sweating bullets, almost forgetting to pronounce us man and wife."

Yet something was missing. Something still is. The unfolding stanza of "Freedom," the opening track on his new album, darts out at the listener with its chilling emotional distress.

I'm a little too shy to ask you baby

But tonight I'm in need of a friend
I've been running in this jungle so long
I'm more at ease with my enemies than I
am holding your hand

What is Little Steven saying in these lines?

"I've had to become a reporter, in a way, in the last few years, dealing with the ugly parts of life, and in the end you become different, hardened. You don't know where to draw strength from," he says with a sigh, "in order to get back in touch with something soft. After a while, you start crying out for personal comfort; some fundamental, primitive tenderness. The Hopis I've met with in Arizona, some of the oldest ones feel that this is the end of the world, as it was foretold in their tribal prophecies—and that that's OK. And I'm like, 'W-w-w-wait a minute! That's not OK! I don't want it to end right now! Can't we mend our spirits? Fix our history?'"

In his 1933 autobiography, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Lakota Chief Luther Standing Bear wrote with considerable tenderness about his pity for the oppressive white man: "The white man does not understand the Indian for the reason that he does not understand America. . . . He still has in his consciousness the perils of this frontier continent, some of its vastnesses not yet having yielded to his questing footsteps and inquiring eyes. The man from Europe is still a foreigner and an alien

Men must be born and reborn to belong. Their bodies must be formed of the dust of their forefathers' bones."

The Lakotas know that all people must go back to their origins for the healing to begin, they must embrace all of who they are, with tenderness, pity, and hope

"Actually," Van Zandt says, his eyes averted, "on my previous trips to Italy I've wanted to go to Calabria, to the mountainous southern peninsula in order to follow up on my own blood roots and hidden family ties. But I always found it too difficult to go where my real father came from. He died some years ago. I don't especially want to think about any of it. It's done."

"I'm still investigating the basis of the mystical Hopi beliefs and those of other Indian legends," he adds. "It all seems so distant here in California, with this Hollywood thing I'm finishing right now, shooting videos, trying to get my career and my politics on track together. But the Indians have hit on a timeless wisdom. They believe the living and their ancestors continue to work together. All indigenous peoples seem to have that same thing, that bond between the dead and the living, the past and the present."

For Little Steven, it might all begin with his blood father, the phantom. What, incidentally, was his vocation?

The question stops him cold. "Oh, er, I've never discussed this," he stammers. "But I think . . . from what my mother told me . . . he was"—long pause—"a frustrated musician." ☺

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PAGED HEAT

A trip down mammary lane. By Alan Betrock

"The last issue of DARE featured an article titled 'Will Fruits Take Over?' In future issues DARE will continue to expose the homosexual menace in government, industry, the arts, wherever it arises. DARE maintains a large staff to do research on homosexuals. They are currently covering Salt Lake City."

"Are snakes sexually attracted to women? Is copulation in any position other than that practiced by fish sinful? These are not idle questions, but rather questions that have concerned the best minds of mankind."

"You can wink about your Paris sex and dream of wide open Havana, but when it comes to a sintown, it takes Yankee ingenuity to really operate one the way it should be operated. There is only one town north of the Mason-Dixon line that holds the undisputed title of King Sintown. It is Waterbury, Connecticut. The ease with which one can find a willing woman in Waterbury makes Paris look like an all-girl's seminary." —DARE, 1956

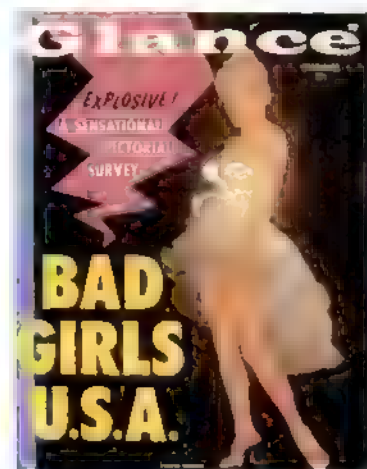
Think of the 1950s. The history books tell us it was a serene and dull era—Republicans in the White House, golf on the fairways, Levittown in the suburbs, Davy Crockett hats on the kids, and G-rated television all over the tube. And perhaps it was, but alongside this conservatism came a wave of some of the wildest magazines this country has ever seen. This was the most sensationalized period in America's journalistic history, with each new title trying to outdo its competitors with the most bizarre, crazy, sexy, and violent concepts and stories imaginable, and for almost a decade the public ate it up.

It was no small movement, either. At their mid-'50s peak, exploitation magazines (so named because they exploited the fears and fads of their day) accounted for an astounding 35 million copies of sales each month, and one title, *Confidential*, became the largest-selling newsstand title in the country at four million per issue. *Confidential* was run by a man named Robert Harrison who had made a small fortune in the '40s with racy pin-up titles like *Flirt*, *Whisper*, *Titter*, and *Beauty Parade*. Launched in 1952, *Confidential* made good on its promise to tell the uncensored truth about people in high places by getting its stories from informants and hard-nosed detective work, including the pioneering use of telephoto lenses and intricate listening devices. By the end of 1955, Harrison was earning over \$250,000 an issue—at a time when nearly half of all American families made less than \$3,000 annually. Competing publishers, however, were not about to let *Confidential* rake in a fortune without a fight. In 1955 there were some 35 scandal sheets launched in competition. The aboveground media called this "sewer journalism" but it didn't stop the magazines from using any means necessary, including downright fabrication, to sell copies. But this glut of titles was soon too much for the market to bear, and circulations began to fall. Also, in 1957 a major California trial decision forced *Confidential* to stop prying into the private lives of celebrities, and Harrison was a broken man.

But scandal magazines had opened up the public's eyes, and publishers sensed that copies could be sold on sensationalism and exploitation alone. Put a woman



with 46-inch breasts and a bikini on the cover, and you were guaranteed a couple of hundred thousand copies sold. If the '50s magazine explosion was fueled by anything, it was by women with huge breasts—in dresses, in towels, in negligees, in everything except nothing at all. There was a whole series of titles born to capitalize on the pin-up craze. Many were straightforward, but others came up with more adventurous concepts to sell their wares. Some of the weirdest and wildest were *Girl Spies*, *Girl Wrestlers*, *Exposing America's Sin Cities*, *Vice Over America*, and *Lady Killers*. Then there were romance and confession magazines, which seemed geared to teens but were pretty wild and racy, with stories like "I Starred in the Lions Club Smut Show," "Wild Boys Crashed My High School Slumber Parties," and "Teenage Glue Sniffing Orgies." But it was in this kind of duplicity that these magazines' genius lay. Published in an era of extreme puritanism, they cleverly played both sides of the coin, emphasizing on the one hand that they opposed such scandalous trends as loose sex, drug use, and ho-



mosexuality, while at the same time going to great lengths to depict it all in the most graphic way possible. Few of them survived past the early '60s, when they fell victim to overexposure and changing public tastes. But enough have survived in private collections to remind us that the '50s were not as dull as the history books would have us believe.



"The Ponges Island in the South Pacific is overpopulated with flawless seven-foot blondes whose special characteristics are Jayne Mansfield type bosoms and tiny pointed heads. Their call is a high pitched shrilling sound, 'Ohmonya! Ohmonya!'"

"A pal of mine from Texas and myself were doing the continent after selling our oil wells. For kicks we'd lean out of our hotel window on Boulevard St. Michael and lasso pretty girls right off the street. Not one of them objected. In fact we had trouble getting them out of our hotel room after we pulled them in." —GLANCE, 1959

"Sex is their problem. Bad Sex. What makes attractive girls sell their wares? How does the pattern shape itself when a young woman makes merchandise of that which she should hold above all things? Using charm to gain wealth is a national curse."

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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt, tan shorts, a blue cap, and a brown belt, holds a cigarette in her right hand. She is standing outdoors with a blurred green background.

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